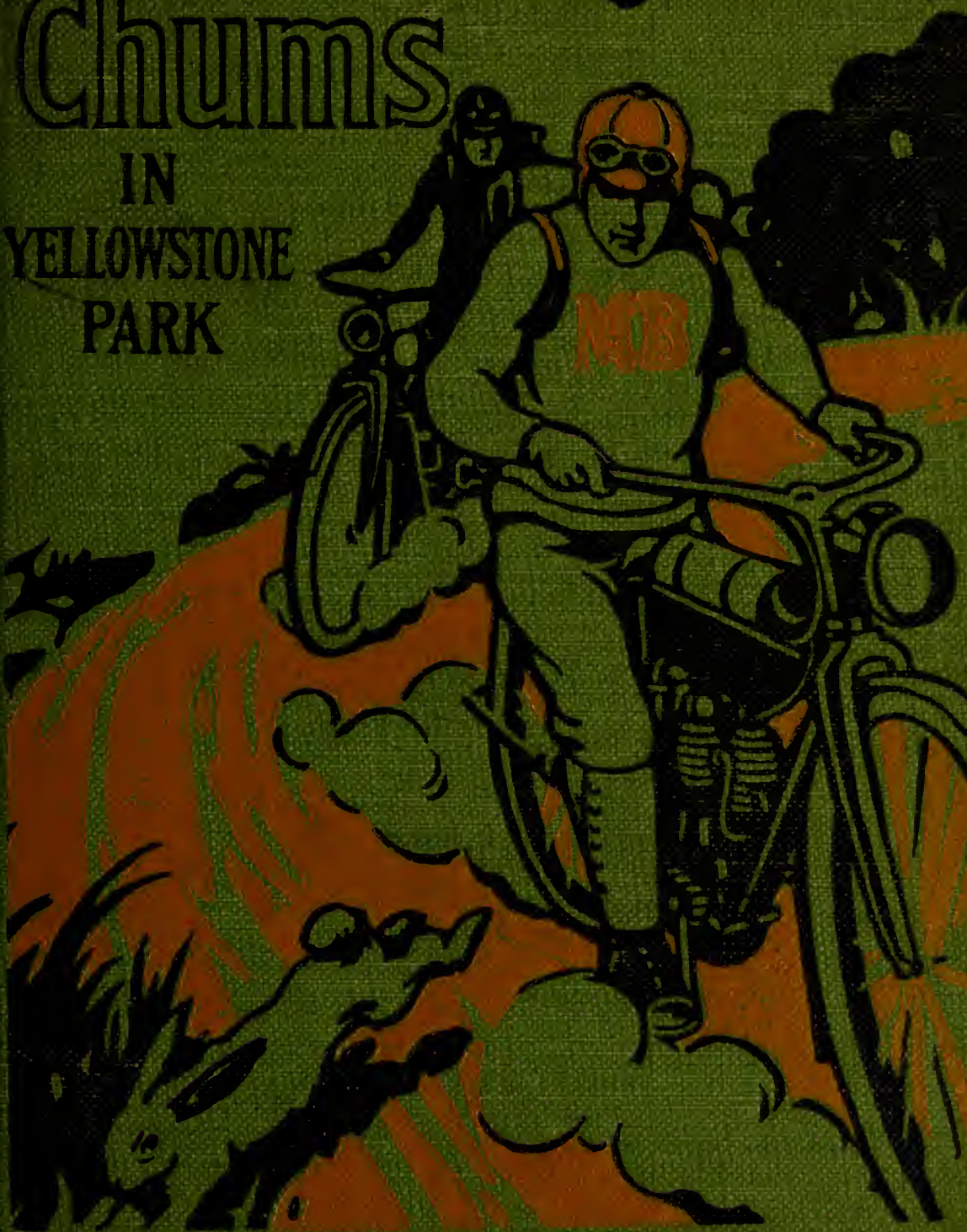
Motorcycle Chums

IN YELLOWSTONE PARK



ANDREW CAREY LINCOLN

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Lester H. Allen

It Seemed to Alec That He Had Never Known What a Tremendous Noise Motorcycles Could Emit

(Motorcycle Boys in Yellowstone Park) (Page 127)

Motorcycle Chums
in
Yellowstone Park;
or,
Lending a Helping Hand

By
Andrew Carey Lincoln

Chicago
M. A. DONOHUE & COMPANY

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Motorcycle Chums in Yellowstone Park

Chapter I

BUDGE AND FRECKLES

"Oh! how happy I would be, if I only had my jolly old music maker guitar along."

"Budge, will you ever let up on that moan? I'm sick of hearing the same thing over and over again. Why, Alec and Jack and me, we're shaking hands with ourselves every day, just because we've got you *muzzled*, for once."

"Muzzled—who, me? Goodness gracious! Freckles, whatever do you mean?"

The fat boy, whom his companion had called Budge, actually raised a hand to his face, as though he expected to find some sort of iron cage, like the mask of a baseball catcher fastened there.

Freckles, whose name at home in Staunton was Ambrose Codling, chuckled, as though it

really pleased him to give the stout boy a little scare.

They were seated beside a swift flowing stream away up in that wonderland of the Great Northwest, which the Government guards jealously under the name of the Yellowstone Park Reservation.

This country takes in a vast stretch of choice territory bordering the famous Rocky Mountains. Within the guarded district are nearly all the marvelous spouting geysers, and similar objects of interest that annually cause thousands of curious tourists to journey that way.

Besides, within the precincts of the Park wild game of many kinds is protected by every possible device. Soldiers have jurisdiction there, and Government game wardens do the best they can to keep out trespassers, whether poachers of the human breed, or deer, killing wolves, panthers or wildcats.

Close to where Budge and his tantalizing companion sat, could be seen a number of up-to-date motorcycles that gave evidence of being travel stained, though in good serviceable condition still.

As there were just four of these machines

parked in a bunch, it was evident that these two boys had comrades close at hand, undoubtedly the Alec and Jack mentioned by Freckles.

Those who have read the previous stories in this Series will need no further introduction to this lively group of boys. For the benefit of any who are making their acquaintance for the first time in the pages of this book, perhaps a brief explanation may be necessary.

The tall boy who went by the name of Freckles, for reasons that were very obvious, was, as has been said before, Ambrose Codling, in the New York town of Staunton, where his father was a leading doctor.

Budge, very fat, rosy, good-natured, and stubborn, was Nelson Clifford. As boys give nicknames without considering how appropriate they may be, no one could ever tell why he had been called "Budge," save that he always hated to budge at all.

He had the bluest of eyes, that often looked reproachfully at Freckles, his tormentor, and actually shamed him; while a shock of yellow hair covered his large, round head.

The other boys were Alec Travers and Jack Kinkaid. The former had always been looked

upon as a sort of leader, both on account of his resolute nature, as well as the fact of his having spent a whole season on his uncle's Western ranch, so that he knew a heap concerning outdoor life.

As for Jack, his hobby was machinery of all kinds, so that whenever any trouble came along, connected with the modern speed wheels, Jack was called in to do a little tinkering.

Since his father was no other than the inventor of the well known Kinkaid motor, well known in the trade, and among aviators especially, as the most powerful light engine ever devised, it can be seen that young Jack came by his talents through inheritance.

Of course the boys, like all of their kind, had pet names for their motorcycles, and often referred to them as familiarly as though they were human beings, or faithful horses, rather than intricate contraptions of iron and steel.

Thus Alec called his winged steed "*Comet*," Jack had bestowed the name of "*Rocket*" upon his, while Freckles' motorcycle was well named "*Cannonball Limited*," because the reckless owner was fond of speeding ahead of his mates.

Budge, who was often in trouble on account of his clumsy method of handling his machine, and the throbbing noise it gave forth when he neglected to use the muffler properly, had very properly christened his mount "*Old Hurricane.*"

In previous seasons these four motorcycle chums had been through a number of strange happenings, which may be found duly set down in the earlier books of the Series, to which the inquiring boy reader is referred, if he would learn more about their doings.

On one occasion they had taken a trip into the famous Blue Ridge country of North Carolina, known as the Land of the Sky, where they had met with a whole lot of thrilling adventures, while pursuing an errand that took them into the wild haunts of the moonshiners.

Another time we find them with their motorcycles spinning along the Old Santa Fe Trail away down in the Southwest, with a mission entrusted to their charge by one of their parents.

That four such wide awake lads should run across some lively times in the country of the strange mesas, great sand deserts,

nomadic Apaches, and burning heat, can be readily understood by any who knows the average American boy of sixteen today.

And only on the preceding Fall they had toured through the Adirondacks, meeting with a whole lot of strange adventures, such as boys love to encounter, or at least read about.

Through all these strenuous times the chums had thus far passed safely.

If accidents occasionally happened, it might be through the recklessness of Freckles, or some of the clumsy ways to which Budge was addicted, yet some good little angel aloft had kept them from serious consequences.

And besides, the good sense shown by Alec and Jack had frequently prevented the fulfillment of what, at the time, threatened to be disasters.

Another vacation found the four chums a year older, and through experience, more resolute and self confident than ever.

Budge, it is true, had not improved as fast as might be hoped. And Freckles too still hugged some of his faults to his heart. But if one could only compare these boys with what they used to be, the change would readily be noted.

They had shipped their motorcycles out to a station within reach of the great National Park, and ten days previous, started upon their jaunt, which had been carefully charted out by Alec beforehand.

He knew just where they could get additional supplies of gasoline for fuel, as well as oil for lubricating purposes. This was a very important part of the whole trip, for to be stalled many miles away from a post would prove rather troublesome.

And so, for a week and more now, they had been visiting all of the strange wonders to be seen in Uncle Sam's magnificent playground and Natural Park.

Budge often declared he dreamed of spouting geysers, he had looked upon so many of these boiling springs. Often the roads, while fairly decent for the ordinary vehicles used by park visitors, were poorly suited to motorcycles. Many times had the persistent boys been compelled to push their heavy machines for miles, amid the lamentations of poor Budge, who, being very fat, was poorly fashioned for such vigorous exercise.

They had gone through with such an experience today, and Budge, while sitting

there with his back toward the river, talking with his angular chum, was resting up, since he had really mutinied, and refused to go another step that day, come what might.

So the others had favored him, because, truth to tell, all of them had felt the strain of a hard day's work.

One thing had favored the chums above the ordinary tourists who started in to do the spectacular sights of the great park in the orthodox way.

Alec had brought a letter of introduction from his guardian, Mr. Worthington, to Colonel Seaforth, the commanding officer of the military forces in charge of the great reservation.

It seemed that the two gentlemen had been very great friends, and hence the genial colonel was delighted to make the acquaintance of the boys. He was also ready to do everything in his power to assist them in having the time of their lives.

When, however, he discovered that; while Budge packed a most astonishing cargo of stuff aboard his wheel and on his back, and Freckles did the same, the other two boys had guns strapped to their motorcycles, the

worthy colonel looked a bit serious; because tourists are not, as a rule, allowed to take firearms with them into the reservation, all such being left at the post where they enter, and given back again upon their leaving.

Since they would have to sleep out on many nights, if their plans carried, Jack and Alec did not like the idea of being left defenseless. Wolves and panthers abounded in the park, despite the efforts of the wardens to exterminate such destroyers of game, and it would be pretty tough luck if they were placed at the mercy of such beasts. But the colonel discovered a way whereby the law might be strictly obeyed, and yet the boys be allowed to carry their firearms into the reservation without hindrance.

They readily signed a document whereby they agreed not to kill, or attempt to kill, certain game which was being fostered by the Government, such as antelope, elk, bison, mountain sheep and so on, to the end of the list. And they also promised to ruthlessly slaughter such wolves, coyotes, panthers or wild cats as they might see in the course of their sojourn within the confines of the park.

Each of the boys proudly sported the badge

of a deputy game warden. And for the time being, thanks to the influence of the colonel, they enjoyed all the rights which that office entailed.

Budge was very vain of his decoration. He often, when he fancied himself alone and unnoticed, strutted up and down pompously, with his chest puffed out until he resembled a pouter pigeon, Freckles declared.

The tall boy was taking pictures with a small kodak which he had smuggled along. He had promised to snap off all the interesting features of the park for a certain young lady at home, who expected to make lantern slides of the best pictures, and entertain her class at college with the result.

Freckles claimed to have taken Budge while looking so important. Indeed, he was, according to the indignant fat boy, always hovering around with his kodak, trying to get pictures of Budge which would show him in humorous situations, and thus provide fun for the entertainment later on.

Budge did not like it one bit.

He was not only proud, but exceedingly sensitive about his size. And the thought of a roomfull of silly Smith College girls laughing

when they saw him executing some ludicrous "stunt" gave him anything but pleasure.

Which explanation brings us once more to the point where Budge took the term "muzzled" so seriously that he raised his hand to his face, as if half afraid that joke loving Freckles had played a sly trick on him.

"Oh! shucks!" the tall boy went on to say, "I was only speaking in a general sense when I said that, Budge. What I meant was that we forced you to leave that blessed old guitar at home, hoping to have some peace on this trip. Have we had it? Not that you could notice. Again and again and again, I've seen you pretend you were strumming away on the strings, with a plunketty, plunk, plunk, plunk, until I've had to throw a stick at you to make you let up."

Whereupon Budge smiled; and when he allowed his rosy face to take on this look, Budge gave forth an essence of good humor that was usually as "catching as the measles," according to Freckles, who ought to know.

"Well," remarked Budge, softly, "of course I don't want to get out of practice, and so I have to just make believe I'm picking the strings of my guitar. You can do this on any

old musical instrument, or even a piece of wood. If I could only run across a banjo right now, I'd soon show you what a mistake you made in muzzling me, as you call it."

"A banjo!" exclaimed Freckles, throwing up his hands in real or pretended horror. "Don't you ever dare bring one of them old coon song plunketty plunks around this camp, Budge Clifford."

"There you go again, throwing cold water on my noble ambitions," sighed the fat boy, disconsolately.

"I'll be throwing a fit, if you ever ring any old banjo racket in on me!" declared Freckles.

"Oh! don't worry," remarked Budge, complacently, "there's small chance for any such good luck in this desolate wilderness."

"Good luck! Now what do you mean by saying that, when I'm talking of going out of my senses?" demanded the lanky one.

"You couldn't if you tried, Freckles," replied Budge, so innocently that his companion could not take offense, and only grinned. "But I meant that there wasn't a show for me to beg, borrow or steal a banjo up here, where our only neighbors are half tame wild

animals. Sometimes I'm almost tempted to try and make me a musical instrument."

"Go on and keep trying; I guess the country is safe," jeered Freckles, who apparently did not have a very high opinion of his lazy chum's ability in the line of a master workman.

"Forget it," said Budge, with a wave of his fat hand, though at the same time there appeared as near approach to a look of cunning as his blue eyes were capable of showing.

As though this sweeping movement of the boy's arm might have been the signal for resentment on the part of some unnoticed animal that had been prowling near close at hand, there came a sudden startling growl.

Looking hastily up, both Freckles and Budge were astonished to see the head and shoulders of a big gray timber wolf projected from the bushes not ten feet away from where they were sitting.

Chapter II

THE MISTAKE OF MR. WOLF

"Wow! a wolf!" exclaimed Freckles, as he scrambled hastily to his feet.

"Oh! my goodness gra—cious!" gasped Budge.

The last part of his exclamation was almost inaudible, and for a very good reason. In trying to imitate the example set by the agile Freckles, clumsy Budge had managed, as usual, to get his feet twisted. The result was disastrous indeed, since he lost his balance, and fell over backward.

A tremendous splash promptly announced that Budge was in the flowing river. But as he could swim, after a fashion, there was little chance of his drowning.

Besides, Freckles had enough to occupy his attention just then, without bothering about the fresh troubles of Budge.

The movement of the two boys had apparently alarmed the prowling wolf. Perhaps the animal had not expected running across human beings when trying to pick up a dinner.

And as they are hunted so strenuously by the wardens in the big reservation, such wolves as have dens within the limits of Yellowstone Park have learned to scamper for all they are worth whenever they discover the presence of mankind.

And so the wolf turned and vanished. The last glimpse Freckles had of him was a view of glistening eyes, polished fangs, a very red, open mouth, and the bristly hair that stood up on end along the brute's neck.

Freckles was not like Budge.

He could always be depended on to prove himself a lad of action. Indeed, with Freckles to think was to do.

And though he too gave vent to his astonishment, just as Budge had done, in an exclamation, his first act was to snatch up a billet of wood that chanced to be lying close by and wave it ferociously in the air.

Then, as the already frightened beast had turned and made off, Freckles, with his customary recklessness, hurled his club after him.

"Go it, you deer killer! Scat! Get out! Nobody asked you to drop in on us. Don't I wish that Marlin gun was handy right now. Wouldn't I like—"

Bang!

A shot interrupted Freckles' excited outburst.

"Hurrah! Alec forever! That's what you get, you silly old timber thief, for poking your bally nose around a camp of real deputy game wardens."

Judging from the confident way in which he talked Freckles did not seem to entertain the slightest doubt in the world but that the report of Alec's repeating shot gun had sounded the doom of Mr. Wolf.

It is true he had not been a witness to the tragedy, since the trees and brush interfered with his range of vision. But he knew Alec, and that the other seldom pulled trigger without making good.

"That's the way we do it;" Freckles went on, jubilantly. "And I guess we deserve the badges we're wearing, all right. Let Alec loose in this here park a few months, with that hard hitting pump gun of his, and I bet you there'd be the awfulest panic among the wolves 'n cats and other ferocious carnivorous animals you ever heard tell about."

"What's that g—got to do with m—m—

me?" came a chattering voice just at that moment.

Freckles whirled in his tracks, and rushing to the bank of the river, looked down, to discover poor, water-soaked Budge holding on to a rock to avoid being carried away by the fresh current.

"Why, hello, Budge, are you there?" he broke out with.

"Yes I am," replied the other, as indignantly as his shivering would permit; "and I think it's about time you gave me a hand to help me out of this fix. I'm water logged, that's what, and just can't pull myself up."

"Now, that's too bad, Budge," said the other, though the chuckle in his voice belied the sympathy his words were intended to supply. "But I hope you can hold on for just one more minute. Then I'll get you up out of that, sure I will."

He disappeared from the view of the boy who was in the water; and as there was no help for it Budge could only hold on desperately, and count the seconds, puffing and blowing like a grampus meanwhile.

Then he heard, above the noise of running water, a suspicious "click" that made him

look up. Just in time he discovered Freckles in the act of aiming his miserable little snap shot camera at him.

"D—don't you dare take a p—p—picture of me!" Budge shouted, and as a consequence swallowed half a pint of river water.

"I won't," replied Freckles, "because it's all over but the shouting. And Budge, chances are you'll laugh yourself some time, when you see how funny you look down there, just like a great big greenback frog."

"Quit your kidding, and g—get me out, can't you?" cried the other. "If I let go this rock I'll be swept away on the current, and gracious goodness, but this water's awful cold l—let me tell you, Freckles!"

Having gratified his ambition the tall boy was at last sensible of his comrade's real distress.

He tossed the little camera aside, and leaned down to reach a hand to the one in the water.

And when once he caught the plump wrist of Budge in his grip, something just had to come, because Freckles was very strong.

So the dripping fat boy was assisted up the

bank, scrambling for all he was worth, and looking anything but happy.

"Thank you, Freckles," he said, faintly, as he sank in a heap. "I shall always believe you saved me from a watery grave. Oh! how cold it was down there. I don't wonder Alec says the speckled trout in these mountain streams fight like everything. That water must have come right down from the sides of the old Rockies, where the snow is melting every day. Ugh!"

He was certainly shivering, as though the sudden and unexpected immersion had chilled him to the bone.

"Looky there, would you," exclaimed Freckles, "Alec and Jack are coming back to camp, and dragging something along. It's Mr. Wolf, all right. I tell you he wishes he'd never looked in on us this afternoon to say how d'ye do."

"Huh! how can he if he's d—d—dead?" grunted the shivering Budge.

The two boys, on coming up, dropped the defunct gray pirate of the timber lands, and looked in surprise at the bedraggled Budge.

"What happened here?" asked Jack.

"Freckles, start a fire as fast you can, that's

a good fellow," said Alec; "the air's chilly, and Budge will take his death of cold if we don't rub him down, and dry his clothes. How'd it happen? Did the wolf knock you in, Budge?"

"No—no, not exactly," was the reply.

"Fell over something when he tried to jump up—his feet I reckon, because, you know, fellers, they're always gettin' in his way. Cheer up, Budge, the worst is over. I'm going to have a bully old fire in a jiffy now."

While rattling along in this strain Freckles was gathering all the small wood that lay around handy.

"Thank you, Freckles," said the other, very humbly, because he was shivering, not only with the cold but from the nervous excitement following the unexpected coming of that savage looking beast, and what followed. "You see, Freckles pulled me out, boys. It was mighty kind of him, and I'll never forget it as long as I live."

"Oh! come off, now, Budge, that didn't amount to anything, you know," retorted the tall boy, possibly feeling some slight twinges of remorse because he had kept Budge in the water much longer than was really necessary,

just to get a picture of his forlorn condition.

"I just happened to turn around," remarked Alec, "when Jack said he was afraid something had happened over here where we left our wheels, and there I saw the wolf sneaking away."

"And you potted him on the jump, as neat a shot as ever I saw made," Jack went on to declare, with all the pride a true chum might be expected to take in a comrade's achievements.

"It was as easy as falling off a log," declared Alec, carelessly. "All you have to do with this gun is to aim straight, and press the trigger. You can depend on it to do the rest, every time."

"There she goes!" sang out Freckles just then, as he applied a match to the small inflammable stuff he had placed at the bottom of the pile, and a blaze immediately shot upward.

"Good for you, Freckles," said Alec. "Nobody can equal you in getting a fire under way in a hurry."

"Step right up where you'll feel the warmth, Budge," invited the builder of the blaze, now anxious lest serious consequences might fol-

low the protracted stay of his stout chum in the cold water. "And just as soon as you warm up a little, get all your wet clothes off. While Jack's drying the same I'll rub you down with a fine rough huck towel I've got in my pack. It'll start a circulation, and make you feel prime."

"A good idea, Freckles," Alec declared; "sometimes it pays right well to have a fellow along whose daddy is a doctor. Just put yourself in his hands, Budge, and he'll do the the right thing by you."

"Only I hope he leaves a little skin on my body when he gets to rubbing," said Budge rather doubtfully—this thing of being at the mercy of a player of practical jokes like Freckles, was something that did not appeal any too strongly to the stout youth, who could look back to numerous affairs wherein he had come out second best.

But Freckles seemed so contrite, and so much in earnest, that Budge presently disrobed, and allowed himself to be rubbed and massaged and pummeled to an unlimited degree.

Whenever he ventured to raise his voice in protest, Freckles was ready with some sort of

good excuse for keeping up the "treatment."

"You've got to get your blood in good circulation, Budge," he declared.

"Well, ain't I?" demanded the other, "look at me, as red as anything, all over?"

"Huh! lobsters always turn red after being immersed in the water," Freckles calmly told him; and when Budge was trying to get this through his slow moving brain, the tall boy went on, "and besides, you know, Budge, your clothes ain't near dry yet; and you just can't stand around like this, cold on one side, and burning from the fire on the other. Here, let me slap you with the towel, and keep your blood heated up."

Alec finally rescued Budge, and made him put on a sweater, together with an extra pair of trousers he brought to light from his pack.

An hour later, and all was serene, for Budge had donned his own thoroughly dried garments again.

Whether it was due to the treatment which Dr. Freckles had prescribed, and also personally conducted, or something else, the fact remained that Budge was feeling just splendid.

And when he chanced to remark that he

was as "fresh as a daisy," Alec took occasion to suggest that they go on another mile, to a place which he believed would make them a better camp than beside the noisy river.

Fairly caught, Budge could not put up any protest. Nor did he want to plead the baby act when he had just been boasting so vigorously.

So they moved on, pushing the heavy motorcycles, because the road just at that point was really too rough to admit of any but the most expert rider to keeping in the saddle. And because Budge was so unsteady, and liable to wreck his machine, as well as endanger his own neck, by striking obstacles in the way, the rest of the expedition had to "take their medicine."

Before leaving the carcass of the slain wolf Alec made sure to take the animal's ears with him, by removing a small portion of his scalp. He did this, not because of the bounty he might receive for having rid the park of a destructive robber, but to prove to the generous army officer that he had not gone amiss when he had them made deputy game wardens, to defend the innocent creatures upon which the savage onslaught of wolves,

and other similar flesh eating beasts, are vented.

Pushing his heavy motorcycle with its cargo of packages soon caused Budge to complain once more.

And it was only through the exercise of some diplomacy on Alec's part that Budge was enabled to finally reach the place where they were to camp.

Chapter III

THE UNFINISHED FIREPLACE

"Whew! mebbe I ain't glad to get a chance to rest my weary bones," said the fat boy, when the motorcycles had been parked again, and he was allowed to find a soft spot where he could lie down.

"If you're feeling overtired," remarked Freckles, "it's a bad sign. P'raps you took cold with that free bath business, after all. P'raps now I'd better get busy again with my good old rough surface huckaback towel."

"Not much you won't!" announced Budge, sturdily, "not while I'm able to kick and fight. You've got the skin on my shoulders nearly raw right now, with all that rubbing. Why, I'm as hot as anything, I tell you."

"But perhaps I saved your blessed old life, boy," declared Freckles. "Many a feller's developed a case of pneumonia, or whooping cough or measles from just getting ducked in cold water, and letting his duds dry on him. I was bound your ghost should never come back to haunt me, and give me blue fits."

"Where d'ye suppose Jack and Alec have gone?" demanded Budge, suddenly noticing that he and Freckles were alone.

"Oh! to nose around a bit, I reckon, Budge. You know Alec is always wanting to look after things, and get the lay of the land down fine, as it were. I've a notion he wants to see what the road looks like further on."

"Goodness knows but I hope it'll prove rideable tomorrow," the fat boy sighed. "Between bumping over rough places, and pushing my *Old Hurricane* along where it's too much to expect a clumsy rider like me to keep in the saddle at all, I'm sure getting my fill of this same Yellowstone Park. Honest Injun, Freckles, I've been dumped so many times, the skin's knocked off my knees and elbows. Look at the bump on my forehead, will you? And dirt, I give you my word I know every different brand you c'n find in the park. Hadn't I ought to, when I've *tasted* it?"

At that Freckles chuckled a whole lot.

"I reckon you ought to be a good judge of soils, Budge," he remarked; "and you might write out a report for the park people. It's a valuable experience that mighty few people c'n say they've had. But I'm satisfied to let

you do the grand tastin' act. After awhile I'll start a nice little cooking fire, and we'll have a bully supper, with those trout we caught."

"You're right we will," declared the other, brightening up visibly; for Budge had a great hunger most of the time that he was living in the open, and the subject of eating always excited his interest.

"There's only one thing I'm real sorry about," mused Freckles, eying his companion in such a disappointed way, that Budge's suspicions were at once aroused.

"What's that, then?" he demanded.

"I was too slow in grabbin' up my camera. If I'd only happened to have it in my hand, just think what a great picture that'd have made, Budge."

"The wolf, you mean?" remarked the fat boy.

"Yes, together with you kickin' your heels in the air, and doin' the grand back somersault circus act. Just my luck not to be ready. I've always heard about what queer things you see when you haven't got a gun; and I reckon a snap shot camera comes under the same head."

"Queer things, your grandmother!" grunted Budge. "I guess now I was feelin' anything but queer when I dropped over the bank unexpected like. And just when I meant to show you how to scare off a savage wolf, too."

"Say, you scared him, all right," remarked the other, laughingly. "When he saw you stand on your blessed head he got away hot-footed, believe me, Budge. But I wonder what Jack and Alec are up to. I've a good notion to go and see."

"And leave me here all alone?" said Budge, quickly. "No you don't, Freckles, not on your life, unless you first get Jack's rifle unstrapped from his wheel, and let me hold it. How do we know what's around us? There might be a big grizzly bear walk in on me, you understand. And didn't the colonel tell us to keep an eye out for some lawless characters from Jackson's Hole, who have been giving a lot of trouble lately—let me see, he mentioned two of the meanest of the bunch, a French Canadian called Antoine La Farge, and a bad gun man sailing under the name of Barley Hoover."

"I won't leave you, then, Budge; just now,

any way," said Freckles. "And as you say, it wouldn't be a bad idea to unfasten that gun of Jack's. You never can tell when you may need such a thing, in the wilderness. Watch that hawk over there, Budge; the clever feller's ducked down and got a big fish for his supper, but he ain't goin' to enjoy it, you mark me."

"Oh! see, there's another hawk following close after him!" exclaimed Budge.

"Wrong again, Budge. That second chap ain't a hawk. He's the noble bald headed eagle, that we like to boast so much about. Watch what he does, and see if you don't change your mind about an eagle being so glorious and grand."

"Why, he's chasing the fish hawk now, sure he is, Freckles."

"Just like a black pirate vessel would go after an honest merchantman," the other went on.

"Will he rob the poor hawk?" asked Budge.

"Will a fish swim? Would you eat, if they sat you down to a feast? Keep your eye on Mr. Bald Eagle. There's going to be something doing right soon now," said Freckles.

Apparently he never spoke truer words, for

a few seconds later Budge uttered a low cry of astonishment.

"There, he's gone and done it, Freckles, just like you said—made the poor, honest, hard working old hawk drop his fish. And my stars! how the eagle did shoot down and grab the fish in his talons. There he goes flying off with it right now."

"And the hawk has to get busy again catching another supper," remarked the tall boy, as in disgust he shook his fist after the departing "king of the upper air currents," the only bird that is fully able to gaze unblinkingly at the glowing sun.

"But look, Freckles, there's a lot more hawks circling around up there. P'raps we'll see a bully old battle now. They're going to help the poor old feller the eagle robber held up."

"Not much they ain't," snorted the other, "they ain't hawks at all, silly, only turkey buzzards, lookin' for a dead deer."

"Or a wolf, Freckles; mebbe they smell the one Alec shot," suggested Budge, showing no malice or indignation at the name his chum handed him.

"Go up head, Budge; you've guessed it,"

declared the lanky one. "Queerest thing in the world how them buzzards can get on to a thing like that. They say they can scent a dinner miles away, and always come straight to it. But here's the rifle, which I'll stand against this tree, notice. Now, we might as well be unpackin' our things, because we're goin' to make a camp before dark sets in."

This appealed to Budge.

He seemed to have a great liking for moving around, and was never happier than when packing to leave a camp, or unwrapping his outfit on arriving at one.

No one knew half the various things contained in the pack secured to Budge's motorcycle with straps and cords, or the knapsack he carried on his back.

He was forever surprising his mates with things they had not dreamed he possessed. Now it was a regulation stable lantern, ready for use; at other times and he had produced a small edition of a camp hatchet; a rope; a mosquito net when the insects were making night a time of misery for the campers; as well as a variety of things, most of which were entirely out of place on such a dangerous trip as this.

Freckles had never as yet found a chance to examine into the secrets of that big pack. He hoped that at least Budge would be unable to produce an accordion, or any other defenseless instrument, by means of which he could make the cabin night air hideous with discordant sounds which he called "divine music."

Budge, having started in to divest his machine of its cargo, busied himself most industriously in his task.

So earnestly was he engaged that for a time he forgot all about Freckles; or if the other came into his mind at all, he probably imagined the tall boy must be busily engaged finishing the fireplace he had started to make out of loose stones.

All at once, when some question he asked remained unanswered, Budge looked up from his work.

"Well, I declare, I didn't think that of Freckles," he remarked, indignantly.

The lanky chum had disappeared, and ditto the repeating rifle but lately leaning against that tree where Freckles had so carefully placed it, so that in case of an emergency

either one of them could secure the handy weapon.

And now Freckles had gone sneaking off, to look up the other boys, taking the gun along, and leaving him, Budge, to hold the fort.

Of course Freckles looked upon it more in the light of a good joke than anything else, when he took advantage of his guileless companion's attention being so wholly wrapped up in what he was doing, and noiselessly flitted away from the spot, gun in hand.

He was chuckling to himself as he went, possibly picturing the astonishment of poor Budge when he aroused to the fact that, in spite of his declaration that he would not stay there alone, that state of affairs had now come about.

And making a clever guess as to the direction in which Jack and Alec had gone, Freckles kept his eyes on the alert as he walked along, with the wind almost directly in his face.

Suddenly he uttered a pleased explanation.

"There they are, up yonder," he said, with a trace of wonder in his voice. "Now, I wonder what in the dickens they're both on their knees for! I declare if they don't seem

to be peekin' out of the bushes, like there was something on that open place like a prairie to make 'em stare. Why shouldn't I take a look too, when the chance is hangin' right beside me? Guess I will, and here goes."

So saying Freckles crept carefully along, not wishing to let the other boys know he was close by, and imitating their example.

And upon reaching the border of the timber, he parted the bushes carefully, to look out upon a scene that immediately aroused his keenest interest.

Chapter IV

CAUGHT IN THE ACT

First of all, out upon the little prairie that bordered the timber, Freckles discovered a deer. It was different from any kind of a deer he had ever looked upon at close quarters before, too, being much smaller, and more delicately built.

Now, since Freckles had heard considerable about the various species of game which Uncle Sam was trying to protect in the Yellowstone National Park, for breeding purposes, he could easily remember that elk were among the number.

But this was not an elk.

Freckles had seen a number of herds of elk since he and his chums struck the park, and began their leisurely tour through its most accessible territory.

They were as a rule large, powerful animals, and the bucks with their horns had looked especially dangerous to Freckles. Indeed, they had heard of men having been severely injured in combats with angry elk; and one

hunter had been killed just outside the park limits only the preceding fall by a wounded bull that rushed him.

How about the antelope?

Freckles had seen a bunch of them on one occasion. They had been far distant, and had fled in wild alarm at the noisy approach of the motorcycles; but the boys had been able to see what they were like.

And so Freckles was quick to decide that this delicate looking creature must be an antelope, one of the swiftest running and most timid of all the deer to be found on the American continent.

But what on earth ailed the silly little beast, anyhow, Freckles was saying to himself, as he watched its queer actions with interest.

It was some distance away from the border of the timber, and further along, too. A clever marksman might have managed to bring the deer down at that distance, but he would have to be a sharp shooter to do it.

The first thing Freckles noticed was that the wind, what little there chanced to be at the time, was blowing directly into his face. This brought the scent from the deer to the spot where he crouched.

It also explained why the antelope, usually suspicious of every sound, and ready to flee if but a faint scent of danger came on the breeze to its sensitive nostrils, had not sped away when the motorcycle boys came along.

But what on earth was the little animal doing, Freckles asked himself for the third time, as he looked out.

Plainly, the antelope was strangely excited.

Instead or feeding upon the grass that grew upon the open prairie, the animal stood there with neck extended, and gazing toward the timber.

Now it "pawed" at the ground, just as Freckles had many a time seen a nervous horse, tired of standing at the hitching post, do.

Then it would run away for a short distance, stop, turn around, give another look, only to return again in the direction of the timber.

And each time, Freckles saw, it came on a little further than before, so that by degrees it was approaching closer and closer to the trees!

"Wow! I'm on to its little game," Freckles whispered to himself.

He remembered Alec mentioning the fact

that while all deer have the bump of curiosity pretty well developed, the antelope seems to head the list.

Hunters, both red and white, have known this weakness of the timid little creature from away back, and taken advantage of it.

Indeed, Alec had declared, only for this shrewd method of hunting, there would seldom be an antelope shot, so timid and so swift is the breed.

Once, when visiting a cousin who lived upon the Eastern Shore, down in Maryland, Freckles had witnessed the queer sight known as "tolling" a large flock of ducks feeding out in Chesapeake Bay, and safe beyond gunshot.

The hunters had taken up a position in the bushes. Then a small yellow dog, especially trained for the purpose, began to gambol on the beach, playing with a rubber ball.

There was no end to the antics that dog would display, just as every one has seen a a playful mood.

This queer behaviour immediately attracted the attention of the ducks. They soon ceased feeding and began to observe. At first they moved away, but presently the curiosity of a few was aroused, and they swam

closer, with necks stretched to their fullest capacity, and with numerous quackings passing back and forth as though opinions differed.

Finally the whole big bunch was pushing in toward the shore in a dense mass, while the well trained dog continued to roll around, jump up and down, utter little barks, and altogether carry on in a way to arouse every atom of curiosity those silly ducks possessed.

Of course, when they came within easy gunshot the concealed hunters stood up and poured a destructive volley into the rising flock from the heavy pump guns they carried.

This previous experience on the part of Freckles, with regard to ducks now gave him an insight as to what was going on out on that prairie.

The antelope was being "tolled" just as the ducks had been.

In this case, however, something besides a sportive yellow cur had to be resorted to. A dog barking would have caused the antelope to speed away on the wings of the wind.

But one thing Freckles guessed very quickly. His chums did not have any hand in this work, although Alec had promised that

he would show the others how the game was played, the first time an opportunity arose.

No, they were simply interested spectators, the same as himself; for the antelope was slowly but surely, by means of these little rushes, advancing toward a point just a short distance away from where Alec and Jack crouched.

The timber made just a little curve, so that Freckles could, without exposing his presence by thrusting his head out of cover, see the spot toward which the curiosity racked antelope was being drawn.

"Oh!"

Freckles uttered this exclamation in a whisper. He had suddenly discovered something fluttering there on the edge of the timber something that was bright red in color, and calculated to excite attention a long ways off.

He immediately guessed that it was a flaming bandanna kerchief, such as all cowboys wear loosely knotted about their necks, so that it can be raised in order to wipe the dust from their eyes as they gallop madly along.

Then of course some one, red or white, must be lying concealed in that fringe of bushes

along the edge of the timber. The bandanna was held in a human hand. It was being moved in this tantalizing fashion in order to draw the curious little antelope on and on until it had finally reached a point within easy shooting distance.

Of course Freckles knew what would happen then. The crack of a gun was apt to sound the death knell of the timid antelope that had been lured to its own destruction by that one weakness.

And this was well within the boundaries of the great Government reservation and park, too. That meant plainly the concealed hunter must be one who broke the law, and was known as a poacher.

The Government deals very harshly with those who kill game within the reservation, because as a rule the animals are very tame, and easily approached; just as squirrels in city parks lose their natural fear of mankind.

Freckles felt a thrill pass over him.

It was not because he looked upon a novel and interesting sight, though that pleased the boy. But he remembered that the military commandant in charge of the park at the time, had managed to have himself and com-

rades invested with the temporary office of deputy game wardens.

Thus, a duty devolved upon them right now.

Here was a lawless poacher about to commit an act that would be nothing more nor less than an absolute defiance to the park authorities. In other words, this man snapped his fingers at the protection which the law threw about the animals on the reservation.

Colonel Seaforth had plainly advised the boys not to attempt to make any arrest, in case they saw infractions of the law. They might try and secure all the evidence possible, and place it in his hands. His troopers could be depended on to do the rest.

Freckles' reflections were suddenly interrupted.

The sharp crack of a rifle was heard, and a little spurt of blue powder smoke shot out from the bushes where the concealed hunter lay.

Freckles hastily turned his eyes the other way. He was just in time to see the stricken antelope endeavor to stagger off only to fall. Its curiosity had cost the little animal its life.

Immediately the figure of a man appeared, holding a gun in his hand, and hastening toward the stricken quarry.

Freckles noted the fact that he was a rough appearing white man, and also that so far as could be seen, he was alone.

Reaching the spot where the antelope had fallen, the poacher went down on his hands and knees. Freckles had half expected to see him take the little animal up, throw it over his back, and stalk off to some distant camp.

But apparently he was about to dress the game then and there, which fact would indicate his desire to have venison cooking as soon as possible. The hunter was evidently hungry, and did not mean to delay breaking his fast any longer than was absolutely necessary.

Freckles wondered if his companions would do anything. He knew that both Alec and Jack had been greatly pleased when Colonel Seaforth hit upon the clever idea of having them deputized to serve temporarily as game wardens, just so they could lawfully carry firearms into the Yellowstone Park.

And he was also certain that they would

like to repay this kindness in some fashion, if the opportunity arose.

Well, here was a splendid chance right before them; and Freckles conceived a sudden brilliant idea.

He began to walk toward the spot where Alec and Jack lay, apparently talking matters over in whispers.

They detected his approach, and both made signs to him not to speak; for of course they did not dream that Freckles had witnessed the little drama ending in a tragedy.

"I saw the whole business, fellers," whispered Freckles, as he joined them, "and now it's up to us to get some evidence to put in the colonel's hands."

"Just what we were talking about; and Alec here seems to think the best thing we can do is to take the man's gun. That will be evidence against him."

"Oh!" whispered Freckles, "perhaps it might, only he'd swear he lost it. Now, I've got a plan worth ten of that; though I reckon we'll have to take his gun too, so he won't be able to play hob with us, when he knows what I've done."

"Tell us what it is," Alec demanded;

whereupon the other held up something which he carried over his shoulder with a strap.

"Here's my bully little camera, boys," he remarked. "Now, suppose I crept out yonder and snapped off a picture of the poacher in the act of cutting up his game?"

"Fine!" exclaimed Jack, under his breath, "and we'll go along to protect you. I see you've brought my rifle along. Give it to me, Freckles, and make sure your Kodak is in shape to do the work."

As Alec was just as enthusiastic as the others with regard to the clever little scheme Freckles had thought up, the three boys broke cover, and advanced as softly as they could toward the spot where the man was busily engaged.

Far beyond was a peculiarly shaped hill that was well known to the guardians of the park. If it appeared in the background of the picture the evidence would be deemed complete in any court, and an easy conviction assured.

They must have made a very successful advance, for the poacher apparently never dreamed of their presence. Freckles, with an armed chum on either side, was ready to do

his little job. When he believed that he was close enough, he got his focus, saw that the peculiar hill was in the picture, and then told Jack to start things.

So it happened that a sudden cough was the first intonation the hunter had that he was not alone.

He immediately arose to his knees, knife in hand, and with the carcass of the antelope in plain view beside him. And as he turned his face so that the rays of the western sun fell full upon it, Freckles triumphantly pressed the button.

Chapter V

PLAYING THE GAME

It was certainly a tableau, with the astonished poacher kneeling there; Alec and Jack standing on either side of the ambitious kodak worker; and Freckles himself, wearing a broad grin, for he believed he must have secured a splendid picture.

Then the man seemed to suddenly realize what it all meant, and that he had been caught red handed in the act.

His face was far from being one that would win the confidence of a stranger; and when that black look swept over it the man seemed positively ugly.

He gave vent to some pretty strong language. And when the boys saw him make a lunge to one side, they understood.

It was his rifle he was after.

"Here, none of that!" called out Alec, instantly; "you're covered by two guns, and it'd be as much as your life was worth to try any game on us. Drop that!"

The man looked at the speaker.

At first, seeing they were only boys, he may have conceived the idea that it would be an easy matter to browbeat them.

Something in the decisive, clear-cut language of the one who spoke made the poacher hesitate. After all, a gun may be just as dangerous in the hands of a half-grown boy, as in the possession of a man—even more so, since he does not ordinarily have the mature judgment of his elder, and may, acting upon a sudden impulse, press the trigger a little too hard.

Besides, there is something very convincing about the frowning muzzles of two leveled guns, not more than twenty feet away.

And so the man dropped his weapon, throwing it from him in a fit of rage that found vent in rumbling, lurid language.

"Stop that!" said Alec, sharply. "We don't care to listen to such talk from you. And to let you know that we're not meddlers, interfering in things that don't concern us, I might as well show you this."

He threw open his coat and exhibited to the astounded poacher the deputy game warden badge that Colonel Seaforth had fastened there with his own hands.

Not to be outdone in this convincing line of argument Jack and Freckles hastened to follow suit. No doubt the trapped poacher was greatly impressed by what he saw. He must have begun to believe that the woods fairly swarmed with officers sworn to see that all violations of Uncle Sam's game laws were properly punished.

But at least he did not start to swearing again.

"Now listen," Alec went on to say, "we don't mean to arrest you for shooting protected game in the National park. Colonel Seaforth and his troopers will attend to all that later on. We've got all the evidence necessary, in this little kodak picture. You can't go back on that. And if you're wise, you'll hurry up to make yourself scarce around the Reservation, before the soldiers start out to round you up."

The man fairly glared at Freckles and his little black snap shot box, as though he held him wholly to blame. Why, they could actually hear his teeth grind together.

Then he pretended to sneer, even while casting a quick look toward his gun. Alec could guess what evil thoughts were doubtless

passing through his mind. Once allowed possession of his gun, who could tell what such a lawless man might not do in order to hide the evidence of his guilt?

And Alec had already settled in his own mind that it would be folly for them to allow the poacher to go free without first "cutting his claws" as it were, by depriving him of the power to do them a bad turn.

"Your name is Barley Hoover, I believe," Alec continued.

It was only a guess on his part, but he saw at once that he had hit upon the truth, for the poacher scowled, and grunted, but made no denial.

"Well," Alec went on to say, impressively, "Colonel Seaforth is mighty anxious to get you to rights. You've been a thorn in his flesh a long time now. And he'll be glad to get this evidence."

"Huh!" again grunted the angry and disgusted man.

"Freckles!"

"Right here, Alec."

"Step over and pick up that gun."

The man writhed, and a look of mingled desperation and cunning flashed across his

heavy face. Alec again read his thoughts.

"And be sure, Freckles, to come in from the side, so that at no time will you be between our guns and him. We expect to fire at the drop of a hat if he so much as takes one step! You understand, Hoover. If you're fool enough to want to dare us to shoot, just try it, that's all. Go on, Freckles."

It was easily done.

The man seemed to believe Alec would carry out his threat, for he was careful not to make the slightest advance toward Freckles, while the latter was obeying the order of the leader.

The poacher's rifle was placed at Alec's feet, and so far as that went he was rendered harmless.

"Perhaps he's toting a small gun, too. These bad men always do," suggested Alec, and then he again addressed the poacher, while moving closer:

"Hold up your arms, Hoover! That's just what I mean, and you've got to do it, no matter how it galls you. Now, Freckles, see if he's carrying any other shooting iron. Let him keep his knife. Steady now, Hoover;

you never were closer to a hole in the ground than you are right now."

Again was Alec's experience in ranch ways proving valuable to the chums. He knew mighty well that it is always dangerous policy to give a "bad man" any lee way. Treacherous by nature, cruel in the bargain as they usually are, such "gun men" show no mercy. They are ready to repay kindness with a shot in the back.

When Freckles made a hasty search he easily found a big and ugly looking revolver. The man snarled when he felt it taken from him, but those menacing weapons warned him against making any undue hostile movement.

"That's all, Hoover," said Alec, when Freckles announced that this was the extent of the poacher's firearms. "You can trot along now, keeping your knife. Yes, and as you may be some time in reaching a place where you can get grub, take part of the antelope along with you. It's a costly bit of game for you, Hoover. I suppose you've got matches along with you? Oh! all right, I was going to give you some, so you could make fires to cook with. Take that part

yonder, and leave the other half. And now, just move on with you."

The man must have realized that he was up against the real thing. Though apparently tempted at first to indignantly spurn the other's offer, on second thought he bent down, wrapped some of the meat he had cut off in a part of the skin, and tucked the bundle under his left arm.

He was now ready to depart, but before going he looked steadily at Alec and each of his two chums. There was a dancing gleam in the poacher's eyes that boded ill for the boys should the circumstances ever arise whereby the shoe would be upon the other foot, and Hoover have the upper hand.

"Reckon as how I'll know you-all again," he said—only that and nothing more; but between the lines the boys could read all sorts of dire unspoken threats.

If he thought to make them quail, the lawless game poacher and bad man had another guess coming. Freckles even laughed scornfully, and gaily snapped his fingers, having thrust the big revolver through his own belt.

"We call your bluff, Hoover," he remarked; "and for fear you shouldn't remember who we

are, let me introduce the crowd. I'm Ambrose Codling; this stout boy is Jack Kinkaid, and the one who's done most of the pow wow business with you, Hoover, is Alec Travers. But hold on, there's another one of the crowd you haven't met yet. His name is Budge Clifford, and you sure miss a big thing when you fail to run across our other chum. Oh! going, are you, Hoover? So long! and don't let the grass grow under your feet."

The man was muttering to himself as he walked hastily away; but he did not once look back, soon entering the timber, and disappearing from the sight of the three boys.

And Alec noted with satisfaction that he was heading in a direction directly away from their proposed camp.

"Now, what do we do next?" asked Freckles cheerfully, as he worked his kodak so as to bring another unexposed portion of the film into play.

"I hope you got a good picture," remarked Alec.

"Everything was fixed for a jim-dandy one! make your mind easy about that, Alec," the other assured him.

"The colonel will think it a good joke to

have such positive evidence, and if his men can only round Hoover up, they won't have any trouble about convicting him," Alec went on to say.

Jack had something on his mind.

"By the way, Alec," he observed, "what did you mean by telling Hoover he could take *half* the antelope away with him?"

"Why, just what I said—without a gun how is he to get game, and unless he has a pard somewhere around, he'd be apt to feel pretty hungry in a day's tramp southward."

"Yes, I understand all that," Jack continued, "but why give him only half, when he could easy carry both haunches, and not feel it?"

At that Alec chuckled.

"Well," he remarked, "perhaps I had an idea that some of my chums might like to see what antelope tasted like."

"But the law, Alec—assistant game wardens and all that?" exclaimed Jack.

"Gee! I guess Alec's got that fixed up all hunky dory! Me for venison every time," was what Freckles said, enthusiastically.

Jack looked as though he wanted to be

shown, for Jack was always a very conscientous fellow.

"I look at it this way," said Alec. "The law forbids the trapping or shooting of certain game at all times, inside the boundaries of the park. It doesn't say a word about *eating it*, after the deer has been killed. I'm sure any game warden would be justified in doing that, under the circumstances."

"I suppose if we didn't use this, the wolves or coyotes or foxes would get away with it in a hurry?" ventured Jack, already half convinced.

"Bet your sweet life there wouldn't be a single scrap left by morning," was the emphatic way Freckles put it.

"All right," Jack declared. "I'm with you. It'd be a shame to feed wolves with such good meat as this little deer. And I'm venison hungry myself, to tell you the honest truth."

So they gathered up what was left of the poacher's quarry, at least the parts worth taking, and then headed back for the place where the motorcycles were parked.

They found an anxious chum waiting for them.

Budge had heard the report of the rifle.

He believed of course that Freckles must have fired that shot, but he dared not go any distance in order to find out; because, being the only one left in camp, it seemed to be his duty to keep guard over the wheels.

So poor nervous Budge had armed himself with a stout club, after which he concealed his ample proportions behind some friendly bushes, and there waited to see what would turn up.

As the minutes crept along on leaden wings, each one seeming an age, Budge kept growing more and more anxious, until he was almost at the point of giving a loud yell, when he heard voices, and saw his chums advancing.

He might have started in to reproach Freckles for the trick the tall boy had played upon him, only that just then he noticed what the other carried. And the sight gave Budge such sudden pleasure that he felt he could even forgive the lanky one for so basely deserting him.

"What's that you're carrying—fresh venison, Freckles? I declare if it ain't, wow, and are we going to have it, along with our trout, for supper? Bully for you. But goodness gracious! ain't that a rotten thing for trusted

game wardens to do? I don't know after all if I could enjoy eating it. I reckon I'd feel bad every time I thought of that kind Colonel Seaforth. But what in the dickens is that sticking in your belt. Freckles—a great big gun, as sure as I live! And that don't seem to be Jack's rifle you're carrying either. What's happened? You've gone and had an adventure, I know you have. Tell me all about it, somebody quick!"

He was soon put in possession of the facts, and seemed to be greatly interested.

"That's the time, Freckles," Budge said, when he knew all that had happened, "when your old picture box came in right handy. But when you develop your films, you want to be mighty careful how you get me mixed up in this poaching business. You snapped me off just ahead, remember; and if you didn't turn the crank, p'raps I'll show up alongside that antelope. Nice thing it'd be to have your poor chum arrested for shooting game in the National Park, when he wasn't near at all. Pictures sometimes do lie—I've seen 'em."

But Freckles promised to be very careful,

and Budge presently forgot his fears in delightful anticipations of the coming feast.

A fire was started, and before long all sorts of delightful odors gave evidence to the fact that supper was in process of cooking.

The boys had managed to carry a frying pan together with a coffee pot, along; and each pack contained besides, a tin cup, a platter made of the same material, also a knife, fork and spoon.

Thus they were able, given the material, to cook a pretty good meal. And as all of them were very fond of camp fare, it may be set down as certain that they gladly seized upon every possible opportunity for doing this.

And the trout proved to be as fine as any they had ever eaten; while the antelope was very good; and the coffee "just dandy," Freckles declared. All of them could take it without milk or cream, which was very lucky, since just then they had not even a can of the condensed article along.

Afterwards the boys settled down to pass a pleasant evening, though Alec made sure to keep all the guns within easy reaching distance. He did not know but what the furious

Barley Hoover might allow his anger to get the better part of his discretion, and come creeping back, hoping for a chance to recover his rifle, and get revenge at the same time.

Budge did not sit with the rest as they talked. Indeed, he had his back toward them, and seemed to be working most industriously upon something, none of the others could imagine what. But then Budge was subject to queer freaks; and so when one of these moods came upon him they usually let him alone. As a rule he surprised them with some innocent and useless invention that served to amuse them for the moment, but was never of any practical value.

And while the three were talking about the late adventure, all at once a most dreadful jangling sound startled them.

Chapter VI

SQUELCHING BUDGE

"Wow! they're on to us! All hands on deck to resist boarders!"

Freckles roared this out even while making a dive for the repeating rifle which he had taken from the bad man, Hoover.

Snatching this up, with trembling hands, Freckles drew the hammer back, and then looked eagerly around for a first glimpse of the onrushing enemy.

Nor had the others been less agile in getting their hands on the guns that lay so conveniently near.

Budge seemed to be the only one not at all disturbed by the awful clamor. He was sitting there just as before, and appeared to be rocking his body to and fro.

Freckles gave one look.

"It's him!" he burst out, in a thoroughly disgusted tone.

Just then, following another volley of ear splitting tin-can type of sounds. Budge started in to warble the first strains of some-

thing he was very fond of, calling it a Spanish serenade, though Freckles always declared it sounded more like a cat on the back fence of a moonlight night.

"Hi! there, that's sure the limit!" cried Freckles.

Dropping his gun in haste he strode over to the singer. Budge was so wrapped up in his delightful occupation that he did not seem to be aware of all the furore his little outbreak was causing.

The first thing he knew he received a rude shock, when Freckles snatched his wonderfully constructed "banjo" out of his hands.

"Well, what d'ye think of that, now?" cried the tall boy, holding the thing up so that the others might see what Budge had been doing. "Blest if he ain't gone and punched holes along two sides of the rim of his tin pie pan, and fixed some guitar strings across the basin. Did you ever see the like? He's just crazy over music, and yet can't play a tune so you'd know it."

Freckles proceeded to dismantle the so-called banjo without waiting for Alec to give orders.

"Why, bless your innocent heart, Budge,"

he remarked, as he went on with the work of destruction, "if we let you play all you wanted on that tin pan banjo, you'd have us in the bug house. And besides, I reckon the Government'd jump on you for scaring all the pet animals out of the park. They'd run two hundred miles, once they heard such music. Wow! ain't I right, Alec?"

Of course Alec, upon being appealed to, had to agree that a good deal of what Freckles had said was the truth.

But he knew Budge was terribly disappointed. The poor chap really believed he had accomplished wonders when he changed his humble pie pan into a musical instrument, by straddling the concave side with guitar strings. And his ear for melody was so very faulty that he could not understand why the others failed to appreciate the results of his "genius."

Alec did not want to hurt his feelings any more than he could help. He was not so brutally plain spoken as Freckles. And yet he realized that if he allowed the fat boy to make mighty use of such an instrument of torture as this home-made "banjo," none of them would have any peace.

There were other good reasons for refusing his consent, lots of them; but wise Alec only touched upon one.

"Understand, Budge," he said, seriously, "we've gone and made a bitter enemy out of this Hoover. For all we know he may have a companion not many miles off, because Colonel Seaforth told us he generally ran with a French half breed named Antoine La Farge. Well, if that turns out to be so, they're just as apt as not to come back here looking for us before morning."

"You don't say, Alec?" exclaimed Budge, forgetting even his grievance against Freckles, in the face of this serious announcement.

"And on that account, if no other, it would be reckless for us to make all sorts of noise. I'm letting the fire die out, and we'll have to stand the chill of the night air the best way we can."

Alec had no need to say any more.

"Oh! that's all right, Alec." Budge broke out with, cheerfully. "I understand all about it now. I did hope to be able to enjoy a little half hour of classical music once in a while, even if there *are* some people who haven't got any ear for such a thing. But since you ask

me so nicely to refrain, and my music might betray our camp to the enemy, why, it's all off," and he calmly pocketed the now detached guitar strings.

"That's a bully good word, Budge—*re-frain!* I hope you'll keep on saying it to yourself everytime you feel a temptation to break loose. You're right, my ear ain't educated up to the high standard you set. I can understand sonatas like my aunt plays, and even rag time; but I've got a heap to learn. Yes, please refrain, Budge, and we'll have a vote of thanks passed."

Budge only lapsed into moody silence, as though he really felt that genius had received a hard jolt.

Several times he was seen to pick up his perforated pie pan and gaze fixedly at it, to finally stroke his head mournfully, and lay it aside.

Meanwhile the others were talking things over.

Jack and Freckles had heard what Alec said when convincing Budge of the folly entailed in such an amount of noise as he seemed happy in making.

"Did you really mean that, Alec?" asked Jack.

"What do you mean?" the other inquired.

"About the chances for those fellows dropping in on us?" Jack continued.

"There's always a risk," replied Alec.

"Then you think Hoover may have a pard not far away?" Freckles remarked.

"It doesn't stand to reason that he'd be roving around here all alone. Men seldom do that. They like company—some one to talk to. And the more I think about the thing, the stronger it looks," Alec told them.

"But he has no arms except a knife," objected Jack.

"His pal would have, and perhaps could fit Hoover out," was Alec's rejoinder.

"And you think he'd come back, after what we blew him about shootin' on sight, and all that sort of talk?" asked Freckles.

"Stop and think," Alec went on. "He knows what we've gone and done, and that Freckles is carrying his picture in his kodak, with the dead antelope right there to convict him. And he's defied the troopers so long to get him with the goods on, that it makes

him just wild to think of that evidence getting into the hands of Colonel Seaforth."

This gave a serious aspect to the case.

The motorcycle chums had not expected to run up against such conditions when promising to lend a helping hand to the authorities. Their acceptance of the deputy game warden badges had seemed more in the way of a joke than anything else—giving them an opportunity to pack their guns through the reservation, and allowing them a chance to shoot any wild animals looked upon as undesirable residents, by those who had the protection of game in their charge.

As Alec had said, the fire was already beginning to die down for want of fuel. None of them fancied the prospect very much. Though it was the summer season, and the days were warm, still, along about two in the morning the air grew quite chilly. At such a time a fire was apt to prove a very cheerful thing to fellows who did not have either tents or blankets along.

Still, the others had such confidence in the judgment of their admitted leader that when Alec remarked it would probably be a wise thing for them to make a little change of base,

so that if the enemy came they would have trouble to locate them in the darkness, even tired Budge made no remonstrance, but readily trundled his heavy wheel after the others.

They did not go far, which was a lucky thing, considering how hard it was to keep to the poorly defined road in the darkness of the night.

"I guess this ought to do," Alec said in a low tone, after they had been pushing along for perhaps ten minutes.

He had led them aside from the road, to where a number of queer rocky ledges cropped out, low down on the face of a precipitous hill.

"We can put our machines along the wall of rock under this ledge," remarked Alec, "and even in case of rain they'd be protected. And every fellow use the chain and little padlock we brought along. Then we'll be able to know our wheels are safe, unless somebody carries 'em away bodily."

"Say, this isn't half bad," declared Freckles. "There's room for us to crawl under the ledge, too. It'll help to keep off the dew."

"But oh! think of the hard bed this rock'll make," groaned Budge.

"Now, hear that, would you?" protested the tall boy. "If it comes hard on a roly-poly pudding like you, Budge, how about a bag of skin and bones made up like me? Mebbe I'll find a hole that just fits me. Or p'raps now there'll be a plenty of pine needles under the trees here, that we c'n gather up, and make soft beds out of."

"Oh! I hope so, Freckles; let's look right away," Budge entreated.

It was found that dry "needles" were so plentiful in spots they could easily be gathered in armfuls, and transported to the place under the friendly ledge, where the motorcycle boys expected to sleep.

And when Freckles came back for the third time he found that Budge had monopolized about all they had gathered, and was already sound asleep.

"Well, of all the nerve!" grumbled Freckles; but he did not have the heart to awaken Budge; so good naturedly starting a fresh bed, he went forth several more times, as Jack and Alec were doing, until he had a good foundation, to keep his sharp hip bones from contact with the hard, unyielding rock.

And in due time three of the campers were

lost to all knowledge of troubles, far gone in refreshing sleep; while the fourth, no other than Alec himself, sat there, gun in hand, taking the first watch.

Chapter VII

THE LONELY VIGIL

A night in Yellowstone Park, where the camper is far away from civilization and the rattle and whistling of railroad trains never penetrates, even with faintest whisper, is apt to be very much the same as could be experienced in any similar primeval American wilderness.

Alec, sitting there and listening, heard many familar sounds. He knew the voices of the night, because he had spent considerable season with the bright stars for a diamond studded blanket overhead. And moreover, Alec was a boy who constantly observed things.

To him the book of Nature revealed secrets that he was never tired of studying. He was forever finding something new to give him pleasure, and add to his store of useful knowledge.

So now he recognized many familiar sounds, from the frogs croaking in some nearby lagoon, perhaps, to the hoot of an owl, perched

in a dead tree, and calling to his distant mate.

The scolding and rustling of a family of gophers amidst the dry pine needles under the trees made him feel as though he were near some old and well remembered friends.

Shutting his eyes and looking back, Alec could easily imagine himself once more on the ranch, where he had put in some mighty happy months. Yes, it seemed as though he must be out with a bunch of his uncle's cow punchers, wrangling the saddle herd of horses or watching the sleeping herd of cattle.

Every time he caught a new sound it gave him a thrill. It was just as though voices that had long been hushed, were coming out of the past. And each one revived some particular pleasant memory.

All the same, Alec did not forget that he was not sitting there for the sole purpose of amusing himself, and arousing these pleasant memories of the past.

He had a duty to perform.

His comrades had gone to sleep trusting in his watchfulness. He must keep constantly on his guard, and be keen to discover the approach of an enemy. So it had been in times past. He had found that the cowmen,

on the approach of a storm at night, had to be watchful, in order to detect any uneasiness in the stock that later on, when perhaps the thunder was booming, and lightning flashing, might develop into a wild stampede.

The time crept on.

Alec intended to stand guard for several hours, and then awaken one of the others, probably Jack. In turn he was expected to yield his place to Freckles, who would finish the night.

Budge, however willing to do his share, always escaped. He could not be depended on. Sleep and Budge were mighty good friends. They always saw a lot of each other and never quarreled. In fact, Budge could go to sleep while his chums were chattering around the campfire like a lot of magpies.

It stands to reason, therefore, that it would be the height of folly to allow such a fellow to stand guard. Why, he would be sound asleep inside of ten minutes, in spite of all the promises and good resolutions he could make.

And so Budge was never counted in when a watch had to be kept. He felt the fact keenly, and often begged them to "just try

him again;" but the boys knew Budge too well, and they never did.

The good-natured fat boy was always offering to do all sorts of things to help make up for this shortcoming. He wanted to cook, but Freckles declared he was afraid he would melt away upon getting so close to the fire; and usually Budge's share of the meal getting was to play the scullion part, and peel the potatoes. Why, he even generously offered to *sing* for them, but they gently but firmly implored him to desist. So that Budge complained of being cruelly kept under a heavy load of obligations to his comrades, which they would not let him pay off.

Of course, in the darkness Alec could not consult the little nickel watch he carried, so as to tell what time it was. It was possible for him to strike a match, and in this way learn; but that was a nuisance, not to speak of the chances he must take of betraying their hiding place to any one who happened to be prowling near.

Alec seemed to believe in his own mind that they had not seen the last of that bad man, Barley Hoover. Often, as his thoughts went afield, covering the recent experience,

he could see that dark, scowling face, and watch again the furious gleam in those wolfish eyes as the man said:

"Reckon as how I'll know you-all again!"

It told of a hatred that burned deep, and would not consider any task too hard in the carrying out of the spirit of revenge.

Hoover knew he would be as good as convicted, did these boys have a chance to develop that film which showed him in the act—"caught with the goods on," as Freckles was fond of saying.

And on this account, if for no other reason, Alec secretly believed they would be wise to cut their extended tour of the grand park short.

It was very important that they get that convicting picture in the hands of Colonel Seaforth with as little delay as possible.

Given half a chance, Hoover would try to upset their plans. Perhaps even now the bad man was hunting for them, backed up by another, who had a reputation second only to his own.

But while Alec had no present use for his watch, he was not kept in ignorance of how the time passed, by any means.

Long ago he had learned the hunter and cowman's method of telling time by the sun, the moon, the stars.

On this night there was no moon after the time came for them to settle down. But a multitude of stars dotted the sky.

Alec, from where he sat, could see myriads of them, all heading toward the west, where a line of distant mountains akin to the Rockies marked the rugged horizon.

From time to time a bright star would hover just above the horizon, twinkle on for a brief time as though bidding the sleeping world good night, and then suddenly vanish from view.

Alec knew just how to measure time by the setting of the stars. He could choose one that was up some distance in the sky, and when it set he knew that one, two or three hours, as the case might be, had elapsed.

And so he had marked one in particular, the setting of which was to be the signal for arousing Jack.

Time was creeping on, and two-thirds of his spell had already gone. Thus far at least nothing had occurred to give Alec any cause for uneasiness. But every once in a while he

would get upon his feet and saunter a dozen paces away, always carrying his gun along with him.

By thus changing his position he was enabled to look back toward the place on the bank of the river where they had first pulled up, and eaten supper.

He believed that if danger hovered near it would be apt to first appear in that quarter, rather than where the open prairie lay.

When the night breeze arose occasionally, it sighed mournfully through the trees. It also carried to his ears the fretful turmoil of the river, as it ran its course among the many rocks that dotted its bed.

But all such were sweet sounds in the ears of the boy. He never wearied of listening to them, for they always brought a charm that might only be experienced but not described.

Alec was listening for something not so pleasant, now. The murmur of human voices, the breaking of a stick under a man's foot, perhaps the swish of bushes that marked his passage through the forest—any one of these he more than half expected to hear.

But time was passing, and thus far there had been no alarm.

The pivotical star, which, setting, was to mark the boundary of his wakefulness, even now drew very near the border line.

Alec calculated that in something like ten minutes, or fifteen at most, he would be able to creep over to where Jack lay, rout him out of his pine needle bed, and occupy the same for the balance of the night.

When Jack's turn came to arouse Freckles he would of course take the place vacated by the tall chum.

Well, after all, Alec would not be sorry for some sleep. There seemed to be nothing in the way of threatening peril hovering near. And several times lately he had caught himself yawning at a fearful rate.

So he determined to go forth once more in order to take another look back toward the place, where they had kept the fire burning during the earlier part of the night.

Really, Alec did not expect to make any discovery now. He had gone through the motions so many times that it was becoming a mere habit to crawl forth, look carefully all around, listen keenly, and then return again

to the place under the overhanging ledge, where he had been sitting.

In this humor, then, Alec began to take his customary survey, at the same time commencing to yawn violently, as a sleepy boy may.

He had not more than half completed the task when his jaws suddenly came together with a snap.

"What's that, now?" Alec muttered, as he focused his attention upon one particular spot.

Sleep was banished from his eyes as if by magic. Indeed, Alec had possibly never been more wide awake in all his life than just then.

Watching closely he soon felt positive that what he saw through the trees was not a star. It moved, as he readily proved to his own satisfaction. And Alec understood that some one must be following the trail of the motorcycles by the aid of a burning torch!

Chapter VIII

A FLICKERING FLAME ON THE TRAIL

"They're coming, all right!" muttered Alec.

Unconsciously, when saying these few words to himself, he tightened his grip upon his repeating Marlin. So many times had he been forced to depend upon his gun, in cases of emergency, that somehow it became his first thought when danger menaced.

Strange what a feeling of confidence a faithful fire arm will inspire in one, when certain types of peril hover near—from wild animals, or lawless men.

Alec was watching the distant light as though it fascinated him. Constantly it approached nearer, and he had no difficulty in determining that whoever carried the torch, it certainly followed the road they had traversed.

The gravity of the occasion began to oppress the boy.

He felt that he must have some one else to share the burden of responsibility, for two heads would certainly be better than one.

Jack!

Why, of course. It was the most natural thing in the world for Alec to desire the presence of his closest chum at such a time. And besides, it was about time for Jack to take his turn as sentry.

Accordingly Alec made his way back to the ledges. He noted that the night was much darker now than when they arrived. Indeed, only for his knowledge of their presence, from the stage road he would never have suspected that there were such splendid chances for shelter so near at hand.

That circumstance might, a little later on, cut something of a figure in the possibility of their discovery by the approaching enemy.

Arriving at the spot, he had no difficulty in finding Jack, thanks to his practice of always drawing a mental map of localities which he had expected to circulate in more or less. And it can be safely said that for one so exceedingly careful, it would be utterly impossible to get lost.

Jack was sleeping soundly, as in fact all the boys seemed to be, if Alec could judge from their regular breathing. It was easy to tell where Budge was curled up because from

time to time he would give a gentle little sigh.

"That you, Alec?"

Jack said this in a low tone just as soon as he felt the touch of his chum's hand against his face. Jack was always calm, it seemed, and able to master his emotions, when others were giving way to excitement.

"Yes, get up, Jack!" whispered the other.

"My time come?" Jack asked, as he sat up.

"Just what it has; but I woke you ten minutes sooner than I meant to," was what Alec went on to say, mysteriously.

Of course words like this were bound to excite any one's curiosity. And Jack had his share of that quality.

"Something gone wrong—Budge walking in his sleep again—a panther hanging around, ready to drop in on us—what is it, Alec?"

"They're coming, Jack!"

The other emitted a low whistle, and began to feel in the darkness for the rifle he had placed at his side when lying down to sleep.

"Hoover, you mean?" he asked.

"I don't know, but I expect he's at the bottom of it," said Alec. "All I can tell you

now is that there's a light back toward the place where we had our supper."

"A light—what kind of a light?" demanded the other.

"Well," said Alec, "it looks to me like a burning torch of candlewood. I've used such to light the way into the den of a bear we'd killed, so's to get the cubs. And as this moves up and down a little all the time, it strikes me some one must be following a trail."

"Our trail?" added Jack.

"Seems as if that might be so," Alec went on.

"Huh! they won't have much trouble about doing that, Alec."

"No, Jack, you're right about that; for the heavy motorcycles left plain marks behind. Even a tenderfoot could pick up that trail, and follow it right here, given the light he needed."

"Shall we wake up the others?" asked Jack.

"I've been thinking about that," replied his chum. "I'd better give Freckles a call. He's got a gun, and can be depended on."

"Then you'll let Budge sleep right along, Alec?"

"He might as well, seems to me, because

he's always getting in the way on account of wanting to do things."

Perhaps in the long run Alec might be sorry for this decision. Budge could be something of a clumsy nusance when awake, but asleep he might prove even a menace to their safety.

However, it was not to be expected that Alec could see so far ahead as all this, and know what might come to pass. All he could do was to decide upon what seemed the best course, according to the light he had.

Freckles sat up, yawning, and digging his knuckles into his eyes.

"Don't tell me the night's three quarters gone already!" he grumbled. "Why, I ain't only had a catnap, seems like."

"Be still, Freckles," cautioned Jack.

"Oh! no danger of waking Budge up; he's a thousand miles away, and eatin' Christmas dinner with his folks, I reckon," declared the other, scornfully, referring to the well known habit of the fat boy to sleep through all kinds of turmoil and racket.

It was nothing unusual, when they were in camp, and a storm had passed over during the night, with much booming of thunder, for Budge to innocently declare in the morning

when he stepped out of the tent or cabin: "Why, would you believe me, it must have rained some last night?"

"Never mind Budge," Jack went on. "Alec told me to get you out. And fetch along that gun you took away from the bad man."

These words were enough to convince Freckles that there must be trouble in the air. All his sleepiness vanished like magic, as a thrill passed over him.

"Gee! then there's going to be something doing, I guess," he was heard to mutter, as he scrambled hastily to his feet.

Alec was waiting for them close by.

"What's on the carpet, Alec?" inquired Freckles, unable to hold his curiosity in check any longer.

"There's a light heading this way, and it looks as though we might be having company drop in on us," came the low reply.

Freckles drew a long breath. Doubtless his heart was beating wildly, for being an impulsive boy he could not control his feelings like Jack, for instance.

They reached the spot from which Alec had made his discovery in the first place. And of

course both of the others were fairly wild to see for themselves the will-o'-the-wisp light.

"Whereabouts was it?" asked Jack, immediately.

"Yes, I'll be hanged if I can see the same," added Freckles.

Alec himself was a little taken aback, for look as he would he could no longer locate the moving light which, at the time, he had felt convinced was caused by a burning fat-wood torch.

"It was right over there," he said, positively, "but I declare if I can see it now. Still, perhaps some trees cut off the view."

"Just as like as not," said Jack.

"Then let's watch and see. If we get even a glimmer of light it'll tell us what we want to know."

They lapsed into silence, but each one was straining his eyes to the utmost in the endeavor to make the first discovery.

"Wow! there she is!" exclaimed Freckles, suddenly.

"Just as you said, Alec," asserted Jack, cautiously.

"Yes, but it's closer now than before," declared the leader of the motorcycle quar-

tette, "which proves I was right when I said they seemed to be following our trail along the road."

"How long before they get here, Alec?" asked impatient Freckles, and the others plainly heard the "click-click" of the hammer of his gun.

"Hold on, none of that yet, Freckles; so lower that hammer again. And when you think there's an enemy close by, you want to cut out that loud click business. Press the trigger with one finger, and draw the hammer back with your right thumb, allowing the trigger to set afterwards. In that way you won't make the faintest sound."

"Thank you, Alec; I'm on; and I won't forget, either. But tell me when they'll get along here."

"Well, the way they're coming I should say it would be all of twenty-five minutes. They seem to stop every little while as if examining the trail," the other went on to say, after a brief hesitation, during which he was evidently doing some mental calculation.

"There's one thing sure," remarked Jack, "they know that when we left the camp where

we had the fire and supper, we didn't mean to go far."

"How would they know that so easy?" asked Freckles, whose knowledge of woodcraft was not all it should be by any means.

"Tell him, Alec," said Jack.

"To begin with, we never could have gone mounted on our machines, without having our lamps lighted; and the four make such a big glow, with all that acetylene gas that these fellows would have noticed the procession."

"Sure thing," agreed Freckles, easily convinced.

"And as they can see our footprints, often across the tracks made by the rubber tires of the wheels, of course they know we walked," Alec continued.

"Yes, and they would guess right away why we quit that other camp," Freckles himself volunteered now. "That bad man, Hoover, has knocked about on trails all his life, I reckon. He could read the signs, Alec, believe me."

"You mean he would guess we couldn't be far away, don't you?" asked Alec.

"About that," answered the tall chum.

"Well, perhaps we'll be able to prove it,

pretty soon," declared the leader, with a ring of confidence in his voice, despite the fact that he continued to talk in what was first cousin to a whisper.

"Yes?" Freckles uttered, with a rising inflection to the word that made it take the place of a question.

"Watch the glim," continued Alec. "If it goes out in a little while, *and stays out*, then they think they're getting pretty warm in their hunt, and believe it dangerous to keep the torch burning."

"Shucks! what a silly I was not to get on to that," Freckles went on to say. "Chances are it's just like you say, Alec, and all we've got to do is to sit here and watch that light."

"Just as though it were a thermometer, or a barometer rather, to tell us whether to look for fair weather, or foul," observed Jack.

"Guess we c'n bank on foul every time, with that tough case of a Hoover at the helm," grunted Freckles. "But you gave the chump fair warning, Alec, what he was agoin' to rub up against, if he tried rubberin' around us."

"Yes. But you know we're only guessing that this *is* Hoover. Chances are ten to

one that way; but we don't know dead sure, boys," Alec cautioned.

"Oh! well, I'm willing to count the nine to one shot, and take it for granted. Besides," Freckles went on, "who else would be so much concerned about our doings as to light a torch, and follow us up? Mighty risky business I'd say, on general principles, out here in this wild country; where suspicious travelers are apt to shoot first, and ask questions afterward."

Then all the boys remained still for several minutes, meanwhile watching the flickering light eagerly; and each one doubtless doing a lot of mental gymnastics in trying to figure out the true meaning of the affair.

By now all doubt had been removed from their minds with regard to one thing, at least. Even Freckles felt sure that the light was a torch, a blazing billet of inflammable wood; and not any sort of lantern, such as the one Budge persisted in carrying along, and which was next to useless.

For they could see the way in which the flame rose and fell every time it chanced to be moved quickly through the air. A torch al-

ways acts that way, no matter of what wood it is fashioned.

Now that it seemed settled in their minds that those who were trailing the motorcycles must be in league with the lawless poacher Hoover, whose deadly enmity they had incurred, what interested the boys above everything else concerned the number of those coming so steadily along.

Was Hoover alone; had he found a boon companion, ready and willing to help pull his hot chestnuts out of the fire; or, on the other hand, was there a whole posse in his company?

Alec wished he knew, for it would make considerable difference in his plans.

Ought they arouse Budge, and go on stumbling along the poor road? They must of necessity push their heavy machines all the way, while those who came back of them were burdened in no such fashion.

Alec knew that such a pursuit could have but one ending, and that the motorcycle boys were sure to be overhauled, at a place perhaps far less adapted to defense than the one they now occupied.

That was really why he seemed content to

remain there. Perhaps the trackers might miss connections; or if it came to the worst, surely with the three guns they possessed, the boys should be able to hold their own.

Alec was not in a mood to begin a wild flight just then. Such a condition of affairs smacked a little too much of panic to suit him. He shut his teeth together, and mentally resolved to stand up for his rights, boy that he was.

And as duly authorized deputy game wardens, surely they had everything on their side, when opposed to such lawless characters as Hoover, and the half-breed, Antoine La Farge.

"It's gone again!" said Jack, suddenly.

"Behind another bunch of trees, I reckon?" suggested Freckles.

"No, you're wrong," remarked Alec; "the torch has been put out! Didn't you see quite a little shower of sparks? That was when the man banged it against a tree. Three times he had to do it before the last spark had been knocked on the head."

"Then what you said a bit back goes, doesn't it?" queried Jack.

"It certainly does," answered the leader, quickly.

"They understand we only changed camp because we were afraid the blaze of our fire might have attracted attention?" Jack continued.

"Yes."

"And that we couldn't have gone far away, eh, Alec?"

"They're keeping along the road now, in the dark, but listening for all they're worth to hear something that'll tell the story," Alec said.

"Thank goodness we haven't any horses to give us away with a whinny," Jack observed.

"Let's hope Budge won't take a notion to snore, or start singin' in his sleep," Freckles muttered.

The idea was enough to make anyone uneasy. Alec listened intently; but just then all was silent in the vicinity of the place where the fat boy slept.

Something else was brought up by Jack that held their attention for a brief period, and so it was all thought of Budge passed from their minds.

The three boys knew they must decide very quickly upon their plan of action, because each passing minute brought the enemy closer.

It was a strange situation for them to face.

Owing to the fact of its being very dark, and the road anything but a good one for motorcycle traffic, they could not think of doing what, under other conditions, would have been their first thought.

This of course would have been to mount their mile-a-minute machines, and quickly leave all danger far astern.

It was folly to think of pushing the weighty wheels along. There was Budge, who would tire of the job, and be ready to drop out before half an hour went by.

And so it seemed there was really nothing left for them to do but stay there, taking their chances of discovery.

Each of them hugged a fond hope to his heart that the enemy might pass by, and discovery be avoided.

If the worst came. they were armed, and might be able by a rattling volley or two to frighten the skulkers away.

And so their eager exchange of views

gradually grew less and less in volume until they finally died away altogether.

After that they crept back a little closer to the ledges, and crouched there in the black night, waiting, and listening for they hardly knew what.

That each boy's heart beat faster than it's wont went without question; but for all the excitement they bore themselves well. Danger and the motorcycles chums had supped together a number of times in the past, and they were not strangers to one another.

The seconds seemed minutes; while these latter appeared almost like hours, because of their expectancy.

Once they were sure they heard the rumble of a man's voice somewhere not far away. This seemed to tell them that in the darkness those on the road were in a fair way to pass by.

Just then there came another kind of sound that struck a cold chill to the hopes they entertained of having their presence remain unknown.

Chapter IX

A WARM RECEPTION

"R—r—r—r—k!"

"Good gracious!" Freckles whispered in Alec's ear, "listen to Budge!"

Again came the sound, even louder than before.

It was certainly Budge. He had rolled over on his back for a change, and was calmly snoring! When he once started in on this, as the other boys well knew from experience, Budge was apt to increase the vigor of his tune steadily with every breath, until he was "going to beat the band," as Freckles always described it. When he reached the highest efficiency of which he was capable, the sleeper would give a snort, become still for a brief period; and then begin all over again.

"R—r—r—r—k!"

"Shall I choke him off, Alec?" Freckles continued to whisper in the other's ear; and from his tone it was evident that he was only too eager to begin.

"Let me go; you stay here with Jack!" Alec answered.

He did not like to leave the "firing line" just at that critical moment, because it seemed as though something might happen while he was away.

Bud Budge would become more rampant with each breath taken in, while he lay there, his mouth partly open, and undoubtedly quite unconscious of the mischief he was bringing about.

He must be muzzled in some fashion, and that right speedily. But Alec believed he could accomplish this duty much better than Freckles, whose method would probably have been to pounce on the sleeper so vigorously as to cause the startled boy to shout out, under the belief that a grizzly had hold of him, or something like that.

Perhaps it was even now too late, and the mischief had already been done; but all the same there was no need of chucking things in this way.

Alec knew just how to head in order to find Budge. Indeed, with all that rattling sound, as though someone were shaking a lot of dry

bones together, and coming as regularly as clock-work, he could not go astray.

And it was not more than twenty feet at the most, which he had to cover, before he reached the sleeping one.

As he bent down Budge excelled all his previous efforts, and gave a long drawn snore that was very much after the style of noise produced by a big saw ripping through a log.

It was his last, however.

Alec's eager hand was clapped over the partly open mouth of the sleeper, and at the same time he whispered in Budge's ear:

"Danger, Budge! Keep still! Don't try to call out on your life! It's Alec!"

The fat boy had started to struggle. Indeed, he even caught hold of the hand that so suddenly impeded his breathing. Doubtless his first thought had been that he was being made a victim of Freckles' love for pranks, because in times past the other had tried in various ways to break up his habit of snoring, even to gently fastening a patent spring clothes pin upon his nose on one occasion.

And the instinct of always being on guard against Freckles caused Budge to instantly

rebel, when he felt that hand over his mouth.

But the mere mention of Alec's name was enough to reassure him. Besides, no doubt his hearing that one word "danger" gave Budge a sudden chill, for he had never been reckoned a very valiant fellow, though far from being a coward.

He ceased struggling.

Whereupon Alec, feeling that it was now safe for him to remove his hand, did so.

Budge sucked in another supply of air, after which he started to sit up.

"What is it, Alec?" he whispered, in an awed tone.

The other knew there was only one way to quiet Budge. This was to put him in possession of the facts. He was like the picture of the baby you've seen in a bath, trying to reach the cake of soap that has fallen to the floor—he would never be happy until he got it.

So Alec, still keeping his lips close to the other's ear, said hurriedly:

"Following our trail—had a torch—put out now—afraid you gave us away when you snored—think it's Hoover and another—

boys close by and on guard—don't say a word, but follow me!"

In this fashion he gave Budge about all the information the other could possibly digest. And he also prevented him from starting one of his volleys of questionings which knew no end.

As Alec once more moved away he knew that the other was tagging along at his heels. Indeed, Budge would have objected strenuously to being left alone, after learning the facts.

They reached the spot where the others crouched. As the boys had a series of signals whereby they could communicate with each other, Alec was able to let Jack and Freckles know who it was approaching.

"Anything new?" he whispered to Jack, as the two detachments joined forces.

"We heard low voices again," came the answer.

"In which quarter?" Alec went on to ask.

"Further along the road. I think there are two men, and that they had gone past us when Budge gave the whole thing away," Jack replied.

"Too bad. We ought to have waked him

up before. But the thing's done now, Jack. What d'ye think they're doing?"

"Feeling their way along, foot by foot, I reckon," said the other; "anyhow, we thought we heard the bushes rustle a little once or twice over that way."

"I reckon you're right, Jack."

"What can we do, Alec?" asked the other chum, anxiously.

"Perhaps we might frighten them off," suggested Freckles, who had his head close to those of the others, and was listening eagerly to all that was said.

"I was just going to say that," remarked Alec. "Let's fire a few shots up at the tops of the trees, and do some shouting in the bargain. By making it look like we meant business, perhaps we can start these fellows on the run. They may be bad men, but they won't like to take chances."

"A bully plan, Alec!" chuckled Freckles. "Give the word, and listen to me let loose my little yawp. Wow!"

"Ready?" asked Alec, raising his voice.

"Yes, I see 'em!" answered Freckles, boldly, in a tone that must surely have reached the ears of the two men.

"Then give it to them, boys!"

"Whoop!"

Freckles banged away as he let out this wild yell. Hardly had the echoes of the gunshot died away then Alec fired; and then Jack came in almost immediately with a third shot, after which the tall boy started once more.

The banging of the guns was also accompanied by all kinds of shouting. Even Budge, carried away with enthusiasm, and wishing to do his little part in the exciting drama, joined in this latter method of making a noise calculated to bring about a panic on the part of the enemy.

Indeed, all taken in all, they produced such a racket that one could easily have believed there were a dozen in the party rather than just four.

Freckles might have turned that fierce looking revolver, taken from the bad man, over to Budge; but Alec had advised against such a move. The fat boy had never been accustomed to handling fire arms, and there was more or less chance that he might do either himself or his chums some damage, of course by accident.

"Hold on! That ought to do. Listen!"

As Alec called this out, the firing ceased, and the boys at the same time stopped their wild shouts.

Plainly they could hear the sounds of retreating footsteps, and as these came from back on the road, it was evident the men must have run that way, doubtless ducking and dodging more or less, as they imagined the bullets singing all around them like enraged hornets.

"Now give them another volley, for good measure, and throw in a few more shouts Freckles," said Alec, who believed it good policy to drive the enemy when you had them on the run.

And nothing loth, both Jack and Freckles started in to add the finishing touches to their work.

The retreating footsteps died away in the distance, and all of the boys drew relieved breaths.

"They're gone, that's dead sure!" said Freckles, "and I don't blame 'em one whit. I guess I'd have flew the coop, too, in a big hurry, with all that row started up on my account. And I heard one feller smash into

a tree ker-slam. Oh! how his nose got a bump. Didn't you hear him bless the thing, though?"

"But chances are they'll come back again," Jack remarked.

"I'm afraid they will," admitted Alec; "if that Hoover is the kind of bulldog his face makes him look like."

"Then we'll have to give 'em another dose," said Freckles, whose fighting blood had evidently been fully aroused by all the shooting and shouting.

"But the next time," remarked Alec, "perhaps they'll change their tactics. They know where we are, now. And by creeping along up above, they might be able to start some big rocks rolling down hill on us. No matter if the ledge does protect us some, the machines might be damaged by flying stones."

"Whew! now I never thought of that," remarked Freckles. "What's the answer, Alec?"

"A change of base," came the reply.

Budge it was who groaned, and he with the least reason of all; but his cozy bed had

seemed so good that he hated the worst kind to abandon it.

Still, Jack immediately agreed with Alec that it would seem the part of prudence for them to baffle any evil designs of the enemy by changing their camp.

And so in the dark every fellow set about finding his own machine, which they were able to do through certain distinctions well known to the several owners.

Chapter X

THE AVALANCHE

Though they had to go very slowly, and with considerable caution, still the motorcycle boys were able to carry out their plans, looking to a change of base, in good shape.

Even clumsy Budge seemed to be spurred on to doing his best, and really carried out his part of the work in a way that did him credit. Perhaps the fact that he was feeling so much refreshed after his sound sleep may have had more or less to do with his surprising success.

Of course they could not go very far, nor was there really any need of trying to do so, under the circumstances.

After moving along in this careful manner for something like ten minutes, Alec believed they had better subside.

This time he turned in among the trees on the side that was further removed from the slope of the hill. Nor was he looking for any protecting ledges. While they might be all very well in their way, they offered an oppor-

tunity of attack, just as Alec had suggested.

"Do we stay here?" queried Freckles, immediately they stopped.

"It's as good a place as any," replied Alec, as he leaned his motorcycle against a tree.

"Oh! ain't I glad!" sighed Budge, who was panting a little from the exertion required in pushing such a heavy weight as his wheel.

"Ditto!" added Freckles.

"It's close to the road," remarked Jack, softly, "and if they manage to get up enough courage to come on again, I reckon I can spot 'em while I'm on duty. You lie down and get a snooze, Alec."

"Oh! do we go to sleep again?" said Budge, in a pleased tone.

"Only sleep, mind," cautioned Freckles, "plain, every day sleep, without any fancy frills. Don't you *dare* roll over on your back again, d'ye hear, Budge?"

"I won't, sure I won't," the fat boy hastened to say.

"Not so loud, both of you," warned Alec, as he started to feel around in search of a soft place, where he could curl up and go to sleep.

"How about it, Jack? Think we c'n take his word for that, or hadn't we better tie him, so he can't roll on his back?" demanded Freckles.

"No you don't!" declared Budge, rebelliously.

"There's no need," put in Jack, to preserve the peace, and nip the impending argument in the bud; "I guess Budge'll behave after this. And anyway I expect to be where I can give him a shake in case he starts to tooting his horn again."

That's all right, then, Jack. And remember, Budge," Freckles went on to say, "if you feel somebody give you a punch, don't go to kicking up a row."

"Oh! you can depend on me, fellers," the fat boy declared, with apparently the most sublime confidence in his own powers.

But Freckles only grunted, as though he did not share in these views. In fact, he was always suspicious about Budge.

Five minutes afterwards and Budge was sound asleep, which fact proved how lightly trouble sat upon his mind. That came of the confidence he felt in his three wide-awake chums. Happy indeed was Budge, to have

such a bulwark of defense thrown about him. And doubtless he would never grow thin through worrying, so long as he did not have to depend upon himself.

Jack was now to take his turn as vidette.

And Alec knew full well that their interests were in safe hands so long as the other remained on duty.

Freckles too could be depended on to stay awake when his chance came, but just now he was trying to imitate the example of Budge, and seek forgetfulness in "sweet balmy slumber," as he called it.

Possibly Alec remained awake long after the two others had crossed the border of dreamland. He needed sleep more than either of them, but the sense of responsibility which leadership brought in its train weighed heavily upon his mind, and this caused him to lie there for some time, gazing up at the blinking stars, and thinking of many things.

But finally even Alec slept.

How long he remained in this state he did not know, when a dreadful racket aroused him; though Jack afterwards confessed that fully two hours had elapsed since they made their new camp, before the alarm broke out.

Of course everybody was sitting up immediately. Even Budge had not been able to sleep through it.

"Is it an earthquake this time, Alec, or did a new geyser break out?" they heard him ask, complainingly, as though this thing of having his sleep interfered with was beginning to worry him considerably.

"Hush! listen!" ordered Alec, sharply.

The rush and roar continued, and it seemed to come from the quarter where those friendly ledges lay.

Alec realized what it meant. He had felt a slight tremor of the earth under his head. He knew almost to a certainty that the revengeful Hoover, bent upon paying back the debt he owed the motorcycle boys, must have done just what he, Alec, had surmised would be the case.

Making his way along the side of the steep hill, and doubtless assisted by his partner, Hoover had started an avalanche moving. His design was of course to demolish the motorcycles of the four young tourists, and thus prevent them from any hurried flight. Perhaps the man was also wicked enough not to care very much if the lads were buried

under the mass of rocks and loose earth, along with their wheels.

His main object, of course, was to make way with that tell-tale little black box carried by Freckles; and which contained on a film as yet undeveloped the evidence that would convict him before the law.

In this wild country bordering the Rockies an avalanche either in winter or summer was no uncommon occurrence, so that it would never be suspected that mortal hands had anything to do with the starting of this one.

The noise was really terrible at one moment, and even Alec felt a shudder pass through his frame at the thought of being caught in such a trap.

Then it gradually died out, until there could be heard only a succession of minor grumblings, as smaller rocks continued to fall like hail.

"Wow! now what d'ye think of that?" said Freckles, somewhat awed by the magnitude of the catastrophe, and the boldness of those whose hands had started the rock slide into life.

"Oh! goodness gracious! ain't I glad we came away," Budge was heard to whisper, as

though by this time something resembling the truth had managed to seep into his slow-moving brain.

"The miserable hounds!" said Jack, indignation marking his low tones; "little they cared if we were caught under that pile of rocks, as well as our wheels."

"And that makes me say, Alec," went on Freckles, "that if we have another chance to pepper 'em, we ought to fill their legs anyway full of bird shot. Don't you say so, Jack?"

"I'm beginning to side with you, Freckles," was the reply.

"Oh! don't I wish I had a gun, though?" sighed Budge, and this was such a remarkable exhibition on the part of the usually inoffensive fat boy, that the others realized he must be tremendously worked up.

All the same, no one generously offered to grant his wish, and see that he was supplied in that respect. They had too great a regard for their own safety to even think of such a thing.

And now the last rumble had died away.

"All down, set 'em up in the other alley," said Freckles, who could no more keep from being humorously inclined than refrain from

partaking of food when hungry, and with a groaning table of good things set before him.

"What will they do now, Alec?" Budge asked, anxiously. "Will we have to fight for our lives, do you think? Oh! ain't I glad I saved that good club?"

"Don't worry, Budge, said Alec, "because I don't think there's going to be any row—just yet, anyhow. They'll probably think they must have covered us all up, because the avalanche grew bigger than they planned for. And in that case, chances are they'll want to lay by till morning, when they can see what's what."

"And how about us—do we have to start on that awful road again in the dark?" Freckles asked.

"No, I reckon we're far enough away as it is," said Alec, who had figured all these things in his mind before, and even planned ahead, as he was always doing, just as a proper, sure-enough leader ought.

"And we turned a bend, in the bargain," added Jack, just as though he could read what was in the mind of his chum.

"But we'll have to skip out of this mighty

bright and early in the morning, I take it," suggested Freckles.

"That's right," admitted Alec, "at peep of dawn, just as soon as we can see the road, so as to avoid the bad places. If we can push our wheels a quarter of a mile, perhaps the light will be strong enough by then for us to get in the saddle, and ride, for a change."

"Oh! I hope so, though it's a rocky road to Dublin, all right," Budge remarked.

He was between two evils; but when he had to choose, the fat boy might always be depended on to avoid that which demanded action. For owing to the fact that he weighed half again as much as Freckles, although not nearly so tall, Budge and hard work were on the "outs." As Freckles said, "they never spoke when they passed by."

"Does that mean more sleep?" the lanky one demanded.

"You've got another hour coming to you if you want to lie down; but when the time's up I'm going to get you," Jack told him.

"All right, give me a call any old time. Me to hit the downy again. But my feather pillow is the bare ground this time, fellers. So long!"

And Freckles stretched himself out on the earth, just as cool as you please. Had it been an old and seasoned campaigner who was speaking, he could not have appeared more indifferent to all outside influences, or manifested more disdain for the discomfort attending their camping experience.

And so once more they settled down.

Jack maintained his vigilant guardianship, while his three chums sought to gain further refreshing sleep.

Perhaps Budge did drop off in due course of time, since he was easily satisfied, and nothing troubled him long. But as for Alec and Freckles, they lay there and tossed restlessly for a long time.

Finally, unable to stand it any longer, Freckles sat up.

"Hello! what's doing, Alec?" whispered the tall boy.

"Nothing that I know of," came the reply, "only there's no need of me trying to get another wink of sleep."

"Same here," Freckles added, "what's the use, anyhow?" I've got to go on duty pretty soon, till daylight. Guess I'll sit up with Jack."

Which he accordingly proceeded to do, while Alec rolled over again to make another attempt at getting some sleep.

So dawn found them.

Nothing happened, of a nature to give them any alarm. And when Alec, having finally lost himself, was quietly aroused, he discovered that a streak of light had shown in the eastern heavens.

Dawn, therefore, must be close at hand, and if they hoped to steal away from the dangerous vicinity, where the bad men were waiting to learn the success of their recent dastardly deed, they must be getting ready.

Quietly then, did each boy take his motorcycle in hand.

"Keep the guns handy; we may be attacked," warned Alec.

"And if we are," said Freckles, grimly now, "I'm not going to shoot the tops of the pines off. You watch my smoke, that's all."

"Aim low if you have to fire," cautioned Alec.

"Oh! I will," replied the tall boy, "because I don't care to be responsible for even a bad man's death; but they want to leave me alone, that's what."

Chapter XI

LOOKING BACK

"Ain't it time yet, Alec?'" asked Budge, impatient for once to be moving.

"Yes, it sure seems light enough to see how to walk along the old road," added Freckles, also eager for action.

Every second that passed added to the suspense. Did an early bird twitter, or move restlessly in the thicket near by, the harmless sound caused their anxious hearts to throb with sudden redoubled zeal, under the natural impression that this might be a sign of approaching human prowlers.

What if already those vindictive bad men had discovered the lack of success attending their bold game, played in the dark? In this event, of course their very next move would be to search for the motorcycle boys; and when once the light had grown strong enough, their keen eyes would easily discern the trail of the wheels beyond the spot where the slide of earth and rocks had covered the ledges.

On this account Alec was willing to start

out just as soon as he could see the way clear.

"All right, boys," he whispered back, "let's be moving. Jack, you bring up the rear; Freckles keep at my heels; and Budge, try and run your wheel in the trail we make. Here goes for it."

But contrary to the expectation of the others, Alec did not immediately push out upon the road.

It was really open enough among the trees to allow of decent progress on foot; and by sticking to this shelter they lessened the danger of discovery, in case sharp eyes should be keeping the road under a state of surveillance, from some point up on the side of the slope.

In and out went Alec, just as though he were weaving an intricate pattern on a monstrous loom, where the trees played the part of pins, and his motorcycle served as a shuttle.

The others wound after him, studiously following out every movement of their recognized leader. It often became necessary to turn away from the road in order to proceed, for Alec was compelled to pick an open route, where bushes and fallen trees might not offer a bar to their steady forward progress.

Budge grunted a little, and of course had some trouble in avoiding stumbling; but then Budge would hardly have been himself otherwise, and his chums expected it.

They had made considerable progress, despite the difficulties besetting them, when Alec noticed that daylight had come on to such an extent that a change in their plans seemed necessary.

Accordingly, the next time the way to the road opened up before him, he took advantage of the opportunity.

The others quickly understood what was in the wind, and both Freckles and Budge were only too glad to welcome the change.

"Bully for you, Alec!" breathed the former, as they ranged, two abreast, upon the road, at this place favoring their start by a gentle descent.

"Oh! bliss!" wheezed the fat boy, ready to grasp any chance to give over the laborious task of pushing his machine, which, according to his fancy, kept getting heavier and heavier with every passing minute.

Alec purposely allowed Freckles and Budge to lead off. After they had gone a few miles or so, and the danger seemed past, he could

signal for a stop, and start the string off under different conditions.

He and Jack brought up the rear.

With considerable racket the first two got away.

It seemed to Alec that he had never known what a tremendous noise motorcycles could emit until then. Budge always did claim that on account of the extra weight his machine had to carry, it might be excused for more than the ordinary spluttering and popping, upon getting off. On this occasion then, its complainings were of the loudest type possible.

But then, what was the odds?

Hoover and his ally would quickly understand the situation, and it could only make a difference of a few minutes' time at most.

And Budge got started, all right; there was considerable satisfaction in that, to be sure.

Other series of loud snapping sounds chimed in, as Freckles' engine started work; to be followed by Jack; and finally Alec himself was on the move.

Nothing occurred to block the start.

Alec felt nervous right in the beginning, not knowing what to expect; but when they

had been moving along the road for several minutes, his confidence returned.

It began to look as though after all they had managed to get the better of their treacherous enemies. Alec's strategy had been of a superior brand to that of the angry and revengeful bad man, Hoover.

Of course the boys could not make anything like speed along so wretched a thoroughfare as the one they were now pursuing. But all the same, while they dodged all manner of obstructions, their pace was such that it would have tried the speediest sprinter to have kept up with them on a half mile run. And at the end of that distance the human, flesh and bone machine would have had to stop, out of breath; while the iron and steel one might go on faster than ever, if the road improved a bit.

"It's all right," Alec was saying to himself, over and over, as he brought up the van of the noisy little procession.

Of course he meant, barring accidents, they were now in a position to snap their fingers at their enemies. If anybody met with trouble it would unquestionably be Budge. And so long as that tremendously loud volley

came from up in front, Alec understood that all was going well with the clumsy Budge; who was apparently keenly on the lookout, and dodging the stones that threatened to wreck his wheel, in a way that deserved special mention.

So one, two miles passed.

By now it seemed as though there need be nothing to fear from the men left behind.

"Bang!"

That was the report of a distant gun.

No one could look back, and altogether the motorcycles were making far too much noise for even Alec's sharp ears to catch the sound of the whine of a bullet overhead. But he had no doubt as to what the shot meant. Hoover must have taken the rifle belonging to his companion, and hurrying to some spot where he could see the road, after it made several big horseshoe curves, had fired at the far-away motorcycle boys.

Several more shots followed the first, but no damage resulted. Indeed, it was extremely doubtful whether the man really counted on making a hit, except through sheer chance. His firing after those he hated

was more in the nature of an expression of his terrible hatred.

Realizing shortly afterward that there was now no need of accepting any chances in the game, Alec sounded his horn in such a fashion as to bring all the others to a stop.

Getting together, they canvassed the situation, and decided to go on for an hour or so, before stopping for breakfast; though Budge did say he could not see how he was ever going to stand it, he felt so weak and wobbly for lack of the proper nourishment.

But then the other boys were accustomed to hearing this kind of talk from their fat chum, on any occasion where meals were not in evidence at regular intervals, and accordingly they paid little attention to his complaint.

Another start was made.

This time Alec took it upon himself, while leading his three chums, to increase the pace to a point as rapid as he believed they could stand. And in making any mental calculations along these lines it was always necessary to consider the weak link in the chain—Budge.

However, he seemed to be on his best behaviour on this occasion, and nothing in the

shape of a serious accident marred the little run.

The road really failed to improve, though Alec believed he had discovered signs of promise ahead. From the little map of the park which he had in his possession, and upon which all the main objects of interest were marked, Alec guessed that presently they would have easier going.

When it was judged that they had put five more miles between themselves and the scene of their latest adventure, the leader threw up his hand and gave a signal with his horn.

And the way in which Budge dismounted was to fall over into a soft bed of grass alongside the road. However, none of the others paid the least attention to his clumsy way of separating himself from his motorcycle; because Budge seldom dismounted gracefully, and on several occasions had been known to pass through twenty feet of air before landing in a convenient mud hole.

"First call to breakfast!" sang out Freckles.

"Suppose you make a fire, then," suggested Alec.

"Yes, that's your specialty, Freckles, and nobody else is in the same class," added Jack,

who, despite his sober ways, could occasionally descend to giving a little "taffy," as Freckles himself called the flattery.

But then Freckles was only too willing to comply, and did not have to be coaxed in the least.

Budge was not the only one with a sharp appetite that was wont to assert itself three times a day, and clamor until its demands had been satisfied. Besides, Freckles was never so happy as when dabbling with fire. He dearly loved to see the flames leaping upward, and seizing on new fuel.

So he set to work.

In almost no time at all he had his cooking blaze going. And meanwhile Budge saw to it that the coffee pot was filled two thirds the way up with clear water taken from a lovely little spring bubbling up on one side of the stage road.

Of course, though Budge only now awakened to the fact, it had been the discovery of this same spring that actuated Alec when he called a halt.

And in a short time the same old appetizing odors began to arise that on many past occasions had aroused them to a sense of the

fact that they were very hungry—coffee boiling, and breakfast bacon frying, making a camping combination hard to beat.

To see them settling down later on to enjoy the meal no one would for one minute dream that the boys were in any sense fugitives. Freckles was as full of mischief as an egg is of meat. He had been repressed so much during the recent night, "sat down upon" he called it, that he seemed to be fairly bubbling over now, with life and spirits.

And when he was in this stage it was always to be compared to the dynamite bomb marked "dangerous." Budge recognized the signs, and on his part kept wide awake so that he might not be taken unawares.

Alec, in sitting down to eat, chose a position that allowed him a chance to look back toward the country they had so recently quitted.

He had marked a place several miles distant, where the road in descending a hill came into full view for quite a little ways.

Here he expected to see the trackers, if it happened that, instead of giving the game up, they were doggedly starting to take up the trail of the motorcycles, in the hope of over-

taking the boys somewhere, and catching them off their guard.

Alec enjoyed that breakfast, possibly just as much as Budge did, although to be sure he did not make one quarter the amount of noise over it, declaring that such crisp bacon, he had never seen before, while the Java made a decoction fit to be drunk as nectar or ambrosia by the gods.

All the while Alec had an eye on the distant stretch of road, so readily seen from their stopping place. For a long time it remained perfectly blank and deserted. While even his sharp eyes might have failed to discover so small a creature as a chipmunk upon the road, he certainly stood to recognize any figure as large as that of a man like Barley Hoover.

And in the end Alec met with success that paid him well for all his scrutiny. Something was moving at last upon the road. What if a bee line of nearly two miles separated the watcher from those figures advancing steadily? He knew one of them very well by this time.

"If you look back a couple of miles, fellows, you'll see something of interest," was the

cool, calm way in which Alec announced his discovery.

And when the others turned to see, they burst out into all sorts of exclamations, spurred by the sight to a free expression of opinions.

Chapter XII

SHOOTING ELK WITH A KODAK

"Well, what d'ye think of that?" exclaimed Freckles, in mingled wonder and disgust over the discovery.

"Are they really chasing after us?" queried Budge, uneasily.

"It looks that way, don't it?" Jack took occasion to say.

"But say, they're looney, ain't they?" the observing fat boy demanded. "Why, we could make circles around em both, if we felt like doin' it, couldn't we, Alec!"

"That's true," replied the leader, as he carefully measured with his eye the distance between the two advancing men and themselves; "we might, if everything went right, but think of the chances for trouble. There are fifty things that might go wrong with a motor that chose to get ugly. And when there are four machines, you can see that these fellows might have something to hope for."

"That's so," declared Budge, not seeming to take it as a personal matter at all, "I re-

member the story of the steady old tortoise and the speedy rabbit. In the end Bunny lost the race, because he was so sure, that he just took a nap on the road, but slept too long. Oh! yes, I've said that same thing to Freckles here, many a time. He's always wanting me to hurry up and run. But I get there in the end, all the same."

"Sure you do," said the tall boy, grinning; "no matter whether it's a goose pond or a pig pen. Just as soon as you see the same, blest if you don't take a crazy notion to root around. Oh! yes, you generally get there by hook or by crook, Budge."

"Now they see the smoke of our fire," remarked Jack.

"Yes," added Alec, "they're stopping to look this way; but I guess the leaves of the trees hide us from them all right."

"There's one of them aiming a gun this way," said Freckles.

"Goodness gracious!" exclaimed Budge, as he rolled over several times until he reached a good-sized tree, behind the trunk of which he hid himself.

The others had not moved, for none of them believed that Hoover would be so

foolish as to bother wasting more ammunition.

"If he does," declared Freckles, and then stopped.

"Well, what will you do if he shoots?" asked the leader.

"Give him one back. I'm tired of having him pot away at our crowd like we might be a gang of convicts broke out. I think I could elevate the sight of this here rifle, and make the two guys duck."

"But," Jack went on to remark, "you can see he isn't going to shoot. That was only done for effect. They've started on the run. Perhaps it was a good thing you saw them, Alec."

"Let's get out of this!" exclaimed Budge.

"Listen to that, would you? Are you done eatin' then, Budge?" asked Freckles.

"Yes, all but these crackers; and mebbe if the road gets smoother I could manage to eat that sort of thing on the move."

"Well, as we're all done, we might as well get along," Alec declared.

He threw some greenish wood on the fire, that immediately began to make a dense smoke.

"What'd you do that for, Alec?" asked

Freckles, in the act of wheeling his machine out on the road again.

"Might as well keep them guessing, if we can," was the reply. "Perhaps if they see that smoke once in a while they'll think we're here still, and that might delay them. But I suppose they'll catch the racket we make in getting under way. It's too bad a motor-cycle is so noisy most of the time."

"But the breeze is coming our way from where they are," expostulated Freckles.

"That's so, but not blowing hard enough to carry off the sound of the sharp explosions made by the spark igniting the gas. But it's all right, anyhow. With half-way good luck we'll put twenty miles between us before we pull up to have a snack at noon."

Fortified by the good meal he had just enjoyed Budge was only too well pleased with the idea of getting on. He shuddered a little every time he remembered hearing about the evil look upon the face of the bad man. Although it had not been his fortune to see Hoover, at the time the other was caught so neatly, and held up by the three other chums, Budge could readily picture the scene. And he disliked violence so much that he would

undergo considerable fatigue, and all other unpleasant experiences, in order to keep aloof from a row.

All the motorcycles were working just prime at this time. On another occasion Freckles' machine had been wont to get out of order. Once it ran away with him while the chums were up in the Adirondack country, necessitating the wildest sort of a chase imaginable, up and down hill, as recorded in a preceding volume of this series.

But Jack Kinkard had overhauled the engine, and apparently cured its faults, because it had been docile and well behaved from that day to this.

And so they all got off decently again.

Even Budge gave no trouble, for a wonder.

If the stage road improved, so that they could let the powerful little motors have freer play, the chances were they would soon throw mile after mile behind them, and long before night arrived they might even reach the well known tavern of which the guide book spoke so well, and which was regularly patronized by tourists making the rounds of the park.

While the road did improve to some ex-

tent, certainly their surroundings became wilder than ever, it seemed to the boys.

An hour after noon they made another halt to rest awhile, and eat again; for strange to say Budge declared he was hungry as a bear.

"While the rest of you are lying here for a while," remarked Alec, "Jack and myself will look around a little. Mind that neither of you stray away from this spot. And if trouble finds you out, fire three shots from the revolver."

"You won't forget us, I hope, Alec," said Budge.

"Well, we're not apt to forget our motorcycles that we're leaving in your charge, are we?" demanded Jack, with a laugh.

Both boys of course carried their guns, though they had no particular idea they would need them. Freckles was working with his pictures as they left. He had an apparatus in his pack that he called a daylight developing box, and apparently he was so anxious to see what sort of a picture he had secured of the poacher and his quarry that he meant to develop it at once.

That would be just like Freckles, always in a hurry, and just the opposite of Budge,

who loved to put things off until another day —that is everything calling for exertion save eating. He was never known to offer any protest along that line. Five times a day he would have cheerfully offered himself a victim upon that altar.

"What's in the wind?" asked Jack, as soon as he and Alec had gone a little ways from the place where the rest were stretched out.

At that the other laughed.

"Now what makes you so suspicious, Jack?" he remarked.

"Oh! somehow I just guessed from the way you winked at me that there was something doing. Have you any idea those men have found horses, and are catching up on us?"

"Well, hardly, Jack. If that happened to be so you don't suppose now, do you, that I'd be leading you off on a little side excursion like this, and leave our two chums to hold the fort?"

"I guess that's so," remarked the other, "but you've still got me guessing, Alec, and up in the air."

"All right. Then I'll relieve your mind, old fellow. I thought you might like to get

a close look at a bunch of big elk," remarked Alec.

"Elk?" echoed his chum, eagerly.

"Just that, Jack."

"Where—how d'ye know they're around?" demanded Jack.

"Happened to glimpse the herd while we were eating. They're pretty tame at this season of the year, especially in the park, where they're never hunted; and often fed during a bitter winter, as Uncle Sam's wards. They didn't seem to scare at the sound of our machines, I noticed."

"And now you're working around so as to come up the wind to them—is that so?" demanded Jack.

"Why, it happens that we won't have to make a very big circuit in order to accomplish that," Alec went on to say.

"Are they far away?" asked Jack.

"No, and perhaps we'd better do our talking in whispers," the other remarked.

"Well, I'll be glad of the chance to get close to wild elk," Jack continued. "Never had a shot at one in my life; fact is I never saw one outside of a zoo or a menagerie till we came out here to the park."

"And you mustn't be tempted to use your gun under any circumstances," Alec advised, "because of this, you know."

He tapped his breast, where the deputy game warden's badge was fastened to his flannel shirt, for both boys had left their leather, reversible coats with the motorcycles when they started out on this little stroll.

"Oh! I'm not apt to forget that," chuckled Jack. "I was just wondering what even a game warden must do if he found himself attacked by an elk bull. They tell me at certain seasons of the year these old fellows are ugly enough to charge you at the report of a gun. Suppose it was the warden's life or that of the elk?"

"Then I reckon the elk would have to get his, if the warden had a gun along. But if it was me, I'd hold off as long as I could."

"I guess I would too," said Jack, after considering the matter.

They kept on advancing.

Alec had been careful to note where the elk were feeding. He also knew which way they were working, and these things were

taken into consideration when he started to stalk the little bunch.

Pretty soon Alec increased his caution, which was pretty good evidence that he believed they must be drawing close to the spot.

A touch upon Jack's arm, and a gesture, informed him that the game had been sighted. There, looking through the open space between the trees, they could see a big elk bull, several cows, and one little youngster hardly three months old, that was as frolicsome as a lamb on the green.

The boys crawled forward until they were at the edge of the shelter. Still, Jack whispered that he was disappointed because they were so far away.

"We can crawl through that grass yonder and get close up," remarked Alec. "I want a close view because on the sly I picked up Freckles' kodak, and here's where I get him a picture worth having."

"Good! Count me in with you!" declared Jack, softly.

So they started out, Alec in the lead, because in case the elk took the alarm, and started to run, he meant to get some sort of

snap shot at them as they sped away, baby and all.

Jack was close at his heels.

They managed to wriggle along, eel fashion, though it was hard work, partly because the guns were in the way, though they dared not leave them.

Had they merely intended to shoot an elk for food, they were already within easy firing distance. Either of them could have brought down a victim without half trying. But Alec wanted to creep somewhat closer, so that he could get a good snap shot.

Perhaps, like most of the park animals, these elk had lost some of their hereditary distrust for man. They had been fed in winter just as though they were cattle on a big farm, and were also accustomed to seeing tourists day after day.

At any rate, none of them showed the least alarm. Even when Alec, slowly rising to his knees so that his head and shoulders came above the tall grass, focused his camera, and snapped off the bunch, he was not noticed in the least.

But on his part Alec had received a stun-

ning shock that for the moment just about took his breath away.

It came in this way:

Just as he saw that the innocent young baby elk was safely in the picture, and his finger pressed the button, he made a startling discovery. Crouching in the grass close to the playful little elk he saw a sleek gray body, and as it turned its head he had looked into the glowing eyes of a hungry panther.

Chapter XIII

WHEN IT TOOK TWO SHOTS

Alec certainly found himself quivering with excitement, when he realized what a near tragedy he was even them gazing upon.

As an ordinary thing a panther rarely ventures away from the shelter of trees. It's usual habit is to crouch along some low-lying limb, just over a trail used by deer in going and coming, for it knows only two well the habits of the animals upon which it subsists.

Then, at a given time, the fatal plunge is made, and the surprised deer has no chance for its life.

Perhaps in this case the wily woods monster had grown very weary waiting for dinner time to arrive. The elk persisted in avoiding the timber. They no longer walked along the old trail in going to and from some salt lick. It was a case of "if the mountain refuses to come to Mahomet, Mahomet must go to the mountain."

And so the panther had for the time being

forsaken his customary woody haunts, and ventured upon the open.

But he remained a panther all the while, with the sly tricks of the cat tribe.

Now, Alec had many a time watched the Tabby cat at home stalking an unsuspicious sparrow, flattening out her body, creeping along silently, never even moving when she thought the bird might be looking, and all with the idea of getting within leaping distance.

That was the panther all over.

With a subtle instinct that any woodsman might have envied, the great gray cat had first of all chosen to creep up on the leeward side, so that the taint of his presence might not be carried to the sensitive nostrils of the elk bull, with whom he wanted to do no business.

Yes, undoubtedly the beast had passed along almost the same trail the two boys had taken, and but a short time before them.

And now he was planted there in the last big bunch of grass, waiting until a playful gambol of the elk babe would happen to bring the innocent little animal within reach of his spring.

That might happen at any moment now.

And the panther doubtless had his hard muscles all set for business. He had settled himself there, and was ready to make his bid for a dinner.

Of course it was the sight of the tempting calf that had caused the beast to adopt this unusual plan of stalking his prey, instead of waiting for it to come to him.

And the fact of having the tender, defenseless calf along may have been the reason why the elk persisted in avoiding the timber trails, since their instinct told them what dreadful perils hovered there.

All this, and more, seemed to pass through the boy's mind as he knelt there in the grass, and watched the actions of those so deeply concerned in the impending tragedy.

The panther apparently was not intending to give up the chance for a dinner, simply because some human beings happened to be near by. Hunger pressed him too hard, and the lure of the baby elk was too great.

True, he bent an occasional backward glance upon them, as if to make sure they were not approaching any closer. And the ferocity of that look served as a warning that

he would not tamely submit to any sort of interference in his plans.

The little elk had commenced to frisk around again, running in eccentric dashes this way and that. At any moment it might approach close enough for the crouching panther to make his spring; and doubtless the beast had already marked off the dead line, beyond which his expected quarry could not come without sudden peril.

Jack had noticed that something was riveting the attention of his companion, although as yet he had failed to discover what it was. This came from the fact that, as he had not arisen on his knees, Jack did not have the same extended survey.

He had heard the slight "click" as Alec pressed the button, and noticed all the elk raise their heads in order to look around.

At first Jack fancied that his chum was maintaining this rigid attitude, so that the bull might not notice him. It is a favorite scheme of a still hunter approaching a feeding deer, to keep his eye on the animal's tail. When he sees the tail give a twitch he stands perfectly still, knowing the deer is going to raise its head to look around for signs of

danger, and that if he does not move a muscle, it will more than likely take him for a stump.

But all the elk had resumed feeding again, so there seemed to be no reason for Alec to continue to hold this frozen position.

Jack's curiosity being aroused, he himself arose just alongside his chum, so he could communicate by whispers.

"What is it, Alec?" he asked.

"A panther," came the thrilling reply.

"You don't say? Whereabouts?" Jack demanded.

"In the grass just ahead, Jack."

"Oh! I see him now," gasped the other.

"He's after that calf," whispered Alec.

"I guess you're right."

"And he's bound to get it, or know the reason why, Jack."

"Looks like it," replied the other. "There, he's turned his head, and shot a glance this way, as much as to tell us to mind our business. My! ain't he a whopper, though, and a bad un in the bargain?"

Evidently Jack, too, was impressed by the bold stand taken by the beast of prey, that refused to give up his plan of attack simply

because two boys chose to come prowling around, and threatening to interfere.

Had they stepped out and caused the bunch of elk to run away, possibly the defeated panther might even have flown at them, in his sudden rage and disappointment.

Of course the boys had passed these brief communications back and forth in the very faintest of whispers. The fact of the elk being "up the wind" doubtless had something to do with their not taking the alarm. Besides, as has been stated before, they were accustomed to more or less association with mankind, since the park keepers even fed them hay at certain places during winter blizzards, these pampered wards of Uncle Sam.

"Well, we mustn't allow that, you know," Alec went on to say.

"You mean we must protect the elk?" Jack queried.

"That's what a deputy game warden is for. We promised the colonel, you know, Jack."

"All right."

Alec heard the faint "click" of the hammer belonging to his companion's gun, when

Jack so decisively said those last two words.

The panther evidently caught the sound too, for again he turned to glare at the boys with those yellow eyes of his. His whole manner told of anger and disgust. Evidently he could not understand why a gentleman might not step out to secure the dinner Nature intended him to have, without some of these impertinent beings that walked on two legs interfering with his plans.

Alec read this in the panther's manner, and it made him chuckle.

"He don't like us to bother him, Jack?" he whispered.

"No more he don't," replied the other.

"That was as plain a defiance as I ever saw," Alec went on.

"Keep off my preserves, or look out; that's what he meant, Alec."

"We've just got to pot him, Jack."

"Then give me the job, I've got my rifle," Jack pleaded.

"But he's close enough for me to bag with my Marlin, because I've got some buckshot shells in the magazine. But all right, Jack, you can have the first chance."

"Good for you, Alec."

"If you fail to wind him up, I must take a hand in, remember," Alec went on to say, impressively, as, laying the kodak at his feet, he slowly raised his gun, and noiselessly drew back the hammer.

"Agreed!" said Jack, apparently much pleased.

The eagerly expected chance for a leap seemed about to come to the waiting panther, for the frolicsome elk youngster was heading directly toward the long grass, kicking its long slender legs in the air with the very enjoyment of living.

"Quick! he's going to jump!" said Alec, eagerly.

For once Jack failed to count upon the marvelously quick action of the big cat. The panther was actually in the air as he hastily fired. Whether his bullet struck the flying beast or not, it did not seem to interfere with his prearranged scheme.

The unconscious little baby elk was borne down under the weight of the animal's heavy body.

Alec knew it was all over, so far as that particular calf was concerned, for undoubtedly the panther had broken its delicate little

back in his fierce plunge. And even if this had not occurred the first act of the beast would be to make his cruel teeth meet in the neck of his quarry, severing the jugular vein, and bringing immediate death.

They were too late to save the innocent, but not to avenge.

Alec was thrilled by the spectacle of that sleek gray monster crouching on top of his quarry, his long tail twitching to and fro, as though he defied any power on earth to snatch his dinner away, now that he had won it.

Unwilling to lose such a chance for a picture that would tell the story of the tragedy, Alec dropped his gun, snatched up the kodak again, and in the briefest possible time had snapped it again.

"You settle his hash, Jack!" he exclaimed.

Of course he understood that his chum must necessarily be nettled by his failure to make good the first time.

And it was in some sense a feeling that Jack ought to have a chance to redeem himself, that partly actuated Alec.

He could just as easily as not have hastened to snatch up his Marlin, and by a single shot ended the career of that predatory beast of

prey. But being a generous boy, he wanted Jack to have the honors, quite satisfied himself to have attained two such splendid snapshots with the camera.

Jack leveled his rifle.

He was feeling just a bit piqued because he seemed to have missed with his first shot, and made a mess of things generally, since the tragedy of the elk calf's death need not have happened had he been quick enough to shoot the panther before the animal leaped.

This time he had his teeth shut tightly, and evidently meant to make sure.

All the same he was hardly a second in aiming, for Jack had handled firearms considerably, and a gun came natural to him.

Then he pressed the trigger.

There could be no mistake about the result this time, for the bullet must have gone straight to the panther's heart.

They saw the gray terror of the timber give a spasmodic leap into the air, and fall over on the ground, his claws digging furiously. Then death must have claimed him, for he lay there almost devoid of motion.

"A good shot, Jack!" exclaimed Alec, at the same time conscious of the fact that the

little herd of elk seemed to be running wildly away.

"Yes, but that first one was rotten. He was too speedy for me, that's what. I waited just a second too long; and before I knew it, he was in the air. So was I, too, to tell you the truth. I fired, but don't believe I touched him. And now, because I didn't get my work in quick enough, the little elk calf is lost."

"Cheer up! plenty more left; and with this panther knocked over, many an elk will have a chance to grow up. But goodness gracious, look what's coming, Jack!"

"It's the old bull charging us! He's just missed the youngster, and thinks we've made way with it. We don't want to shoot him; but what ought we to do, Alec?"

"Run for the timber for all you're worth; and shoot only if it's a case of saving our lives!" exclaimed Alec, starting off at full speed himself.

Chapter XIV

THE QUEER FRUIT A TREE BORE

It was really no laughing matter.

The old bull meant business, as he came galloping swiftly back. Missing the calf, he must have realized that it was a part of his duty as guardian of the herd, to protect the helpless members against outside interference.

Both boys were good runners, and the occasion was one that called for their best efforts. With an angry elk coming tearing along in the rear, they were not very likely to lag.

Fortunately the trees were not far away. Even then they might not have been able to reach this shelter only for a fortunate happening.

On the way the angry bull came upon the still forms of the dead calf and the panther. Something impelled him to stop, and sniff, first at one, and then at the other.

This consumed only a few seconds, but it gave the two boys a chance which they were not slow to improve.

And although the elk bull once more started full tilt after the runners, he was not able to overtake them before they reached the edge of the woods.

As usual Alec had been doing a little planning. He did not know whether the bull would follow them into the timber, or give over the pursuit when the trees were reached.

"Climb a tree, Jack!" he managed to gasp.

His companion heard, and did not stop to ask any questions. There was really not a second to spare, for the thunder of the elk's hoofs striking the ground sounded close at hand.

And the way those boys scrambled up among the branches of a convenient tree was doubtless a comical sight. Alec himself often laughed later on, just at the recollection of it.

The bull arrived on the spot, breathing heavily, and showing all the signs of great rage. Of course the old fellow had failed to grasp the true inwardness of the proceedings. How could dumb brute intelligence be expected to understand that these two-legged human beings had in reality attempted to defend the murdered calf against its inveterate

enemy, and in fact brought about the death of the savage panther.

That was too great a problem for the bull to solve.

All he knew was that the innocent little calf was dead and mutilated; and the presence of the boys, together with the sound of gun shots, seemed to lay the tragedy at their door.

The bull endeavored to reach their dangling legs, and gave Alec quite a thrill when he actually touched one of his feet with his horns.

When they had found time to catch their breath the boys looked at each other, and burst out into a laugh.

"How's this for high?" cried Jack, beginning to see the humor of the thing now, although the situation had seemed anything but funny while the chase was on.

"Pretty high, I should say," replied Alec, who had quickly changed his seat for a more elevated position, where he knew he would be safe from even the most frantic jumps of the elk.

"A nice fix we're in," said Jack.

"It might have been much worse if the

old rascal had caught up to us on the open," Alex remarked. "I think we ought to call it a piece of good luck."

"Yes, that's just as you say, Alec; but he's got us treed, all right. What if the old fellow refuses to let us come down?"

"Oh! he'll get tired of waiting pretty soon, I guess," replied the other.

"But if he don't, what are we going to do about it, Alec?"

Try and hatch up some scheme to make him change his mind.

"And if we can't do that?" asked Jack.

"Perhaps Freckles and Budge will come to the rescue," was Alec's answer.

Jack laughed until the tears ran down his face.

"What strikes you as so funny?" demanded his chum.

"I was thinking of Budge," replied Jack.

"And what about Budge?" the other persisted.

"Suppose he sauntered out here, and the old bull made a bolt for him? I can just hear both of us yelling: 'Climb a tree, Budge, get a move on, or the old jabberwock'll have you!' And say, Alec, it'd sure give me a fit

to see our fat chum climbing for dear life. You wouldn't find him stopping to complain that Rome wasn't built in a day. He'd hurry to beat the band, believe me."

Of course that started Alec to laughing also.

"But," he went on to say, "I wouldn't want it to come to that end, for several reasons, Jack."

"It would be a bit humiliating to us, Alec, for a fact," the other admitted.

"That isn't all. You know how clumsy Budge always is. Suppose now he didn't get up in his tree fast enough. That old rascal of a bull'd have him down on the ground under his hoofs in a jiffy, and Budge might be hurt."

"That's so, Alec," the other agreed, ceasing to laugh now.

"Rather than have that happen I'd dispose of the old bull as a case of saving human life. Even wardens are allowed that privilege, I understand," Alec went on to say.

"Then I hope our friend Budge will stay where he is," remarked Jack, "and if anyone shows up, it'll be Freckles; because he could jump up in a tree and not half try."

"But perhaps we might scare the old bull away ourselves, Jack."

"I wonder, now. He don't look as if he could be easily frightened off. I never saw an animal with a more determined front. Left alone, and I believe the old chap'd camp here twenty-four hours, waiting for us to come down."

"But he won't, I give you my word for that," Alec assured him.

"What can we do? Would he light out, d'ye suppose, if we both fired our guns, and gave a shout?" Jack asked.

"Well, that's a question," replied his chum. "And if he didn't, it'd only bring matters to a focus; because all that row would start Freckles and Budge this way on the jump."

Jack puckered up his lips to emit a whistle.

"Guess you're about right, Alec," he admitted. "But perhaps now you might think of something that would startle our obstinate old friend, and coax him into giving up the siege."

Alec screwed up his face as if in serious thought.

"Let's see," he said, reflectively, "I once

heard of a man kept up in a tree for hours by a wounded grizzly, who raised the siege in a way that was rather unpleasant for the bear."

"How was that, Alec?"

"I'll tell you," the other went on. "He set the poor old Bruin on fire."

"Dropped matches on him, you mean?" asked Jack.

"First he allowed a bottle of alcohol or whisky he had along with him to drain on the bear's thick hair; and then soaking some paper balls with the same, dropped them down, after lighting. In the end he managed to get the bear to burning. The animal rolled over, but as the fire would not be put out that way, he went roaring off toward the river, letting the hunter escape."

"A pretty clever scheme, too," said Jack, "but one we can't try out."

"Not if we wanted to," observed Alec, "because we don't happen to have the alcohol along. And besides, it was a cruel thing; though in that case the man's life was the stake, and I guess he did right."

"I thought at first, Alec, you were going to give me that old chestnut about the wet

powder balls being fired, and dropped on the back of the grizzly. That story has done duty lots of times. I don't know how many hunters have saved their lives, on paper anyhow, by practicing it."

"Well, we really haven't any powder to spare, and so we couldn't have a shy at it if we wanted. I wish we had a rope though. I can see a dandy way to fix the old bull then."

"You'd drop it over his horns, I reckon?" Jack remarked.

"Yes, and fasten the other end to the tree. Then, by moving around, we could gradually coax the bull to wind himself up so tight he couldn't reach us when we jumped down and ran away," Alec went on to say.

"A clever enough dodge, Alec, all right, but even if you had the rope, chances are ten to one you wouldn't use it."

"Why?" asked the one who had proposed the scheme.

"I'll tell you," replied Jack. "As wardens we're here to protect the deer and elk, and save their lives by killing the wild animals that prey on them. Now, how would you like to face the colonel, and tell him you'd left an elk bull tied to a tree with a rope?

He'd starve to death, sure he would, Alec."

"That's so, Jack. I just couldn't use the rope, could I, even if we had one along, which we haven't. On the whole, rather than leave him to starve by degrees, it'd be better to use our guns in the start."

"But you haven't come to that yet, Alec?"

"No, not just yet," answered the other.

"And perhaps you won't have to, Alec?"

"I hope not, Jack."

"Because you're going to think up some scheme or other for shooing the old chap away, without hurting him," Jack went on.

"You've got a lot of confidence in me, it seems," observed Alec.

"Right now you're wondering whether a certain idea you've got in your mind will do the business, Alec."

"Oh! am I?" laughed the other.

"And I think it's about time you told me about it too. How will it work?" Jack demanded, with perfect confidence that he was right.

"It's a question that can only be settled by trying," replied the other.

"Go ahead and explain, then, Alec."

"Well, I noticed that under these trees

it's kind of gloomy," Alec began, which strange remark only added to the curiosity of his chum.

"Oh! so it is; but not dark enough to keep the elk from seeing us if we tried to slip away," Jack ventured to say.

"Now, I happen to have in my pocket that little flashlight pistol Freckles brought along with him. He forgot to put it in his pack this morning, when we were leaving camp, and I picked it up, meaning to give it to him, but forgot all about it."

As he said this Alec thrust his hand into a rear pocket, and drew forth the little patented device, which worked very much on the order of a pistol; and by the pressure of a trigger a cartridge was exploded that would cause a blinding, intensely white light to flash.

Jack saw the point immediately.

"A bully idea, Alec!" he cried, "and I think it'll work, if you can flash it in the old fellow's face. He'll get a shock, all right, and I honestly believe he'll cut stick and run like the Old Harry was after him."

"Well," said Alec, smiling at the other's enthusiasm, "I don't feel as sure about it as all that; but anyhow, I've got the flashlight

pistol, and the thing's worth trying. So here goes."

Of course it was necessary to set the cartridge off directly in the face of the bull, and as close to his eyes as possible.

In order to accomplish this desired result Alec was compelled to do some maneuvering, for he wanted to have conditions just right, so he could obtain the best results possible.

When he began moving around the tree the bull naturally believed he was trying to escape. And consequently the still angry and stubborn beast endeavored in every way possible to get at him.

All the while Alec was on the alert, watching for his chance; while Jack followed after him, more than curious to see how the little trick would result.

Of course, in the daytime, even though it were more or less gloomy under the trees, the flashlight could not be expected to do anything as well as in the night; but then it might dazzle the elk, and accomplish Alec's purpose.

Finally the opportunity he was looking for came along, and Alec was quick to seize upon it.

Chapter XV

AT THE STAGE ROAD TAVERN

"Hurrah!" shouted Jack, "it did the business, Alec!"

Apparently it would seem so, since the elk had galloped madly away after that sudden flash so close to his eyes, dazzled him.

"And we can't get out of here any too quick to please me," said Alec, "because the old fellow may change his mind, and come back again."

Accordingly they dropped down to the ground.

"Hold on," Alec remarked, "I've just got to go out there again, and get Freckles' camera. I left it on the ground when the bull charged, and he'd never forgive me if I lost the kodak."

"It's a shame now, somebody wasn't around with a snap shot box, to get us two roosting in the tree, with the elk jumping up at us. That'd be a picture worth having, Alec."

"Will you come along with me, or stay here?" the other asked.

"Go along, of course," Jack immediately replied. "Besides, there's the panther, you know?"

"Yes."

"I'd like to get his pelt if I could," continued Jack, wistfully. "And anyhow, I ought to have his scalp, to show the colonel we potted something on this tour besides that timber wolf."

"Don't see any reason why you shouldn't," observed Alec. "I guess the bull's thrown up the game for good, because he's joined the balance of the herd, and there the whole bunch gallops away. Come along, Jack."

"Yes, who's afraid," echoed the other, pretending to look very bold.

So they strode forth into the open again.

"Let me tell you there's a big difference in time between our going out and our coming in," Alec chanced to remark, as they neared the scene of the late double tragedy.

"I should say, yes," declared his chum. "I guess I ran faster than ever I did in all my life."

"Except when you slid for the plate and made a home run in our baseball game with Beverly High last year," remarked Alec.

"Oh! I rather think I beat even that record, Alec; because this time I had a pacemaker behind. And the way that elk bull covered the ground was a caution. But here we are."

Alec was glad to find the kodak intact.

"I was a little afraid the bull might have smashed it with his hoofs when he passed along this way, after smelling of the bodies of the calf, and your panther. I wonder now if the meat is fit to eat, Jack?"

"Oh! I wouldn't hesitate a minute, even if it was killed by an animal butcher," replied the other.

"It wasn't that I had in mind, but the age of the calf. Is it old enough? We're always hearing so much about bob veal, and all that," Alec remarked.

"Plenty old enough. Why, you said yourself it was three months or so. And I think I'd like to taste elk meat. Antelope was fair enough. Meanwhile, I'll look at my game."

Ten seconds later and Alec, already beginning operations with his hunting knife, heard Jack utter a satisfied grunt. He seemed to know just what caused this expression, for he instantly remarked:

"Then you *did* get him with that first bullet?"

"Sure I did, though I'm some surprised to find it's so," replied the other. "It took him in the body, and passed clean through, though perhaps touching no vital part. But I'm glad I didn't miss him clean. It makes me feel better."

"How about the second shot?" asked Alec.

"Oh! that was a sure enough cinch. I'd have been ashamed not to have found his heart that time, Alec, for you see his foreleg was thrown out as he lay on the calf, giving me the most beautiful chance."

"Going to skin him, then?" Alec asked.

Jack looked all around before replying.

"Guess I will," he replied. "Don't seem to be anything else threatening. Bull has skipped out; and we left Hoover twenty miles behind. Yes, because the coast is clear I think, with your help, I'll do it. Besides, I want that pelt, Alec."

"Give you all the help I can," Alec announced. "Wonder what Freckles'll say when he developes this film, and sees what I've got for him. Don't say a word, and we'll let him find out for himself later on."

"That'll be a stunning surprise for Freckles," remarked Jack, "but three to one he'll be sorry you didn't get us up that tree."

It took them quite some little time to accomplish both tasks which they had set for themselves, since these boys believed in doing things well every time.

They rather half expected that Freckles would show up as on that former occasion. From the fact that he did not, they surmised that Budge had been smarter this time, and seen to it he was not left alone with the motorcycles.

When they had completed the double task the boys hurried back toward the spot where their companions had been left.

They found them greatly worried over the long absence of the others, and just on the point of starting out together to look them up.

And sure enough Budge had made it a point to get possession of the gun. If left alone again, he meant to be in a position to defend himself, should danger menace.

When they saw what the returned ones carried, and heard a brief recital of the adventure, of course both Freckles and Budge shared in the excitement.

Jack served as chief narrator, partly to give Alec a favorable chance to return the borrowed kodak without the owner knowing he had taken it. The two exposed sections of the twelve exposure film had been safely turned, and Freckles would never know the camera had been tampered with.

And Budge forgot to repeat anything of the hard things he had laid out to shower upon the heads of the absent ones, for keeping them waiting so long.

The answer was not far to seek. One could guess it in the glistening blue eyes of the fat boy every time they rested on the little package of meat which Alec had so carefully wrapped up in the skin of the panther's victim.

"Elk meat!" Budge said for perhaps the fifth time, "that sounds pretty good to me, fellers. Always wanted to taste elk, and Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep. Do we have it for supper tonight, even if we strike a tavern?"

He was assured that such would be their plans; although the story of how the elk calf had come to be killed would have to be retold; and proven, not only by showing the

panther skin, but the marks of cruel claws upon that of the little elk.

With this Budge had to rest content.

There was some little trouble about securing the two new packages to the motorcycles, which were already carrying about all they could stand. Freckles even had the cruelty to suggest that Budge might drop off a lot of useless stuff he had been carrying on this trip. But the fat boy would not hear of it.

"Not a single unnecessary thing in the whole bunch, give you my word," he loudly declared. "And I had room for my guitar, too, only Alec wouldn't agree to me fetching the same; just because some people ain't got music in their souls, and threaten to go and jump in the river every time a fellow plays, and all that sort of stuff. I'm willing to carry that elk meat, inside or out, if you want me to; but throw away anything that's stood by me through good and evil, tumbles and all—no siree, not much!"

Of course Alec would not think of adding a single article to the already great load Budge had tied on his motorcycle. Already the fat boy looked much like a wandering tin peddler on his travels; and the clatter he made at

times, over a rough road, was, as Freckles said "something fierce."

Budge seemed to think, just like the conductor of a trolley car, or the driver of a public bus, that there was "always room for just one more, by squeezing." And only for the fact that Alec kept a watchful eye upon him, there would have been no telling what the fat boy might not have tried to carry, for he hesitated at nothing.

They got away, after Budge had made three separate attempts. He said that possibly he had not divided his bundles properly, so that the balance was wrong. But Freckles declared the wheel itself was registering a "kick" because of the vast load it was compelled to carry.

All went well for some time.

Alec, who had consulted his map so often that he knew it pretty much by heart, entertained great hopes that despite the hills they had to climb they would be able to reach, and put up for the night, at the tourist hotel or tavern of which they had heard only good reports.

This thing of spending the night in the open, destitute of tent and blankets, did not seem to

appeal very strongly to any of the boys. They were very fond of camping, but in order to really enjoy such an outing it was necessary to be comfortable both day and night. And that was a condition utterly out of the question now. And as all of them expressed a hope that fortune would kindly allow them the opportunity of sleeping in beds, for the next night, at least. Freckles declared he had blisters on various parts of his body, brought about by contact with the hard, unyielding ground. As for Budge, he solemnly stated as a fact that there were "dents" all over him, made by roots and stones, so that his body must look like a sight.

There were delays, of course—there nearly always are, when four fellows on motorcycles make a run that consumes hours. And the more machines in the squad, the greater the chances for being held up.

Now it was a tire that developed a puncture, and some energetic work had to be maintained in order to place it in serviceable condition again.

Then Budge, who lagged behind, was reported missing; and a halt was called by the

roadside, while Alec went back to look him up.

He was found a mile or two in the rear, plodding up a rather steep rise, and pushing his heavily laden motorcycle.

Budge had neglected to take the hill on the run, and in consequence his machine pegged out. So he had sat down to rest, and had just started on again when Alec sighted him.

Of course, not wanting to be caught in the same trap, Alec abandoned his mount on the top of the rise, and went down on foot to render "first aid to the injured."

With both boys to push unitedly, the burdened machine was soon at the top of the rise. Here, with a gentle down-slope before him, Budge had no difficulty in mounting, and getting away in good style.

And so the laggard was presently restored to his comrades, and they felt at liberty to proceed.

The day was drawing near its close when Jack heard Freckles give a shout.

"There's your old grub stand, Alec," was the way the tall chum announced his discovery of the country hotel or tavern.

When the rest in turn sighted the building that had attracted the attention of Freckles, all were of the same opinion. It must certainly be the road tavern which Alec had in view when he talked of spending the night.

A stage had come in from another quarter, for it was in the wagon-yard of the inn; and a number of tourists could be seen, moving around, and surveying various points of interest.

It was just the time when late afternoon merges into evening.

Alec and his chums hardly felt like mingling with strangers, and having so many curious glances turned upon them. So they ordered their supper, leaving some of the elk meat so they might enjoy it at the table.

Perhaps the proprietor of the inn believed the strange story the boys told, to account for having elk meat in their possession when the law was strictly against anyone killing such an animal under any conditions. But Alec personally believed the other had his own ideas on the subject.

"Sure I'll have the mutton cooked for you, boys," he declared, cheerfully; and Alec

saw there was really no use trying to convince this doubter.

Besides, so long as their consciences were clear, there need be no occasion for them to worry. They had ample proof to convince the colonel when they saw him again, and that afforded them considerable satisfaction.

It was just after dark, and Alec, together with Budge and Jack, was sitting beside a fire that had been kindled in the living room, as the air was quite chilly, when Freckles came hurrying in, looking for them.

Alec knew the other so well by now, that he could usually read him like a book. And on the present occasion he had no sooner set eyes on Freckles' face than he understood the lanky chum was the bearer of exciting news.

Chapter XVI

ON GUARD

"Tell us before you blow up, Freckles!"

After all, it was Budge who got in his say first. And for him to take notice, meant that the tall chum must be looking mighty mysterious.

Freckles himself guessed as much, and that he was showing his secret in his manner too strongly, for he braced up, as he remarked softly:

"Don't act like you seemed surprised, fellers. One of 'em might just happen to be peepin' in here, and that'd give it away."

He took a cautious look around on his own account. Yes, he even stepped over to the window, and glanced out, for there were several tourists sitting on the broad hotel porch, in rockers.

Then Freckles came back to his three wondering chums, who had surveyed all his actions with more or less curiosity, and suspicion. The last element entered into their feelings on account of the fact that Freckles

had many a time been guilty of playing practical jokes; and they had to be on their guard whenever he developed unusual zeal.

When he had reached them again, he remarked in a low but solemn voice.

"Well, miracles *do* happen in these days, I tell you!"

"Tell us one, Freckles," demanded Alec.

"They must a flew," the other went on.

"Well, lots of men do in these days of aeroplanes," Jack observed.

"But they never could a come that way, sure they couldn't," Freckles insisted.

"Who?" Alec asked so directly that a straight answer had to come.

"The feller that owns my gun," said Freckles, "and his half-breed pal, which I take it must be the same Antoine La Farge we've heard tell about."

"Do you mean Hoover?" Jack asked.

"That's him," answered the other.

"You saw him—here, at this hotel?" Jack continued.

"Yep, as plain as I ever saw my own face in a looking glass. He didn't act quite so black and ugly as when we met him; but there

was a sly look on his face, I tell you, fellers." Freckles went on to say, solemnly.

"How d'ye suppose he got here?" Budge gasped; for whenever an exciting situation loomed up it always stirred the fat boy to the depth of his nature.

"Thirty-five miles, if one," muttered Freckles. "Just whisper to me how them two fellers could get over that ground, hills and all. I'm blest if I know."

But Alec only laughed.

"I wish we never had to tackle a harder question than that," he said.

"What's the answer, then?" demanded Budge.

"Same as brought us here—gasoline," came the quick reply.

"But—they sure ain't got motorcycles?" Freckles exclaimed.

"I don't suppose they have," Alec went on, "but that wouldn't hinder them getting a lift in a car. Such things as automobiles are getting common everywhere these days."

"Sure pop, Alec," chimed in Budge, "why right now there's a couple over in the inn yard, alongside the big stage that brought the crowd."

"Three, you mean!" declared Freckles.

"Then another must have arrived since Budge counted; and the chances are Hoover and his mate were in that," Alec observed.

"But is this an accident, or have they just followed us to get back the gun and pistol Freckles took away from Hoover?" Budge wanted to know.

"That isn't what bothers Hoover the most," Jack remarked.

"Not much," the tall boy went on to say, excitedly, "he's meaning to lay hands on my little snap kodak, so he c'n destroy that evidence, you hear me?"

"I believe you're right, Freckles; and what have you done about it. Didn't I see you developing that roll of films this noon, in your daylight tank?"

"Yes," replied the other, "and I fixed it so the thing dried, too. I've got the films in my pocket right now. Meant to surprise you with a print tonight, if I could get a strong enough light to do the business."

"Then it turned out all right?" asked Jack.

"Fine and dandy. Never had a clearer negative, and believe me, it's going to either run this old Hoover out of the country, or

else send him to prison for a spell," and Freckles patted his coat while speaking.

"But I wouldn't give him a chance to steal your camera, even if you have changed the roll," said Alec, remembering the two interesting shots he had taken of another game poacher, this time a four-legged one, and which he hoped to see in print some day.

"You just bet I won't. I hope to take a lot more bully views with that little box. And besides, it ain't really mine, you know; and I'd hate to tell my lady friend I'd lost it."

"But think of their nerve," said Budge.

"In coming here?" Alec went on to remark. "Oh! they're not taking great chances, I reckon. You see, there are no troopers here, and an ordinary game warden would think twice before he tried to arrest two such well-known bad men, without a whole posse back of him."

"Will they try to rob us tonight?" Budge asked.

"Just as like as not," Alec replied, coolly.

"They might try and hold us up another way, and I guess they're mean enough to do it, too," Jack suggested.

"As how?" demanded Freckles.

"By doing something to damage our motor-cycles, and spoiling our whole trip," Jack went on to explain.

"But why should they do that, I want to know?" came from Budge.

"Yes," added Freckles, quickly, "that sort of thing might make them feel they'd evened up the score some, for our taking Hoover's shooting irons away; but what good would it do the fellers?"

"In the first place, it would keep us here a day or two. We couldn't go spinning along tomorrow, and leave them behind," Jack explained.

"Huh! might be something in that," grunted Freckles. "Guess it's up to me to sleep out there in that shed where we put our wheels. And I'll fix a trap so it'll just wake me up if they try to get in."

"No, you'll not stay there alone, Freckles," Alec said, impressively. "The rest of us will keep you company. I reckon this inn must be pretty full right now, and the landlord would be only too glad to give us a blanket each, if we bunked out there. Of course Budge could stay in the house if he wanted to."

Budge took the alarm at once.

"No you don't," he exclaimed. "We're all chums, and we sink or swim together. An injury to one is an injury to all. United we stand, divided we fall. If the rest of you can put up with it, why should I be chump enough to be lying between white sheets in a downy bed? You count me in, Alec. Make it *four* blankets, when you hold the landlord up."

"Good for you, Budge!" said Jack.

"What's the matter with Budge—he's all right, when it comes to the pinch!" was the way Freckles expressed himself.

And so it was settled.

All thought of resting that night in comfortable beds was abandoned. Instead, they would probably have to sleep on the floor of the shed where the precious motorcycles were stored, and deem themselves lucky to even have a blanket for covering.

Just because Hoover had shown up again.

No wonder Freckles was "mad clean through," as he called it, and could be heard breathing all manner of threatenings as to what he would do if the chance ever came when he would feel justified in using the legs of the bad man for a target.

"The sooner I fix this thing up, then, the better," announced Alec, as he arose to leave his companions.

The other three sat there, talking in low tones for some time. Once Jack felt positive that some one was standing out on the piazza and watching them. He could not see plainly but believed the chances were it must be Hoover.

Then Alec came back, after half an hour had elapsed.

"It's all fixed, boys," he announced.

"Plenty of room out there, I reckon?" ventured Budge, anxiously.

"Oh! it's big enough for a dozen men to lie down without spooning—quite a good-sized place, and with a door we can lock," Alec remarked.

"Then we're apt to fool Mister Hoover, and ride away in the morning as fine as you please, camera and all safe," Freckles said, exultantly.

"Listen," Alec went on, "the best is yet to come. After all, we won't have to sleep on the hard floor."

Budge was heard to give a genuine sigh of relief.

"Cots?" asked Freckles.

"Yes, he's got a lot on hand for extra occasions," answered Alec, "and right now he's having four carried out to the shed, along with all the blankets he can spare. Of course I had to tell him just why we didn't dare leave our wheels unguarded, and he said it was a clever move."

"But he wouldn't want to warn Hoover against trying any tricks?" asked Freckles.

"Well, he happens to know what a hard pair of rascals those men are, and as he isn't in the employ of the Government, he doesn't want to get mixed up in the affair. They could injure his business for him, perhaps burn his hotel down in revenge. And I wouldn't want him to suffer. The landlord's all right. And if it came to a show down, he'd be on our side."

Supper was announced just then, as Alec stopped saying this.

"Is it safe for all of us to eat together?" asked Jack.

"Yes, they might take that time to get in their work on our wheels," Freckles added.

"That's all right," Alec assured them, "the landlord said he would lock up the outhouse,

and have a man stay close by while we ate our supper. Besides, I imagine those two men must be as hungry as bears by this time. Depend on it, they'll postpone their mean business till the night grows older, and the guests at the hotel settle down."

And so, with light hearts they all went into the dining room, where the landlord himself showed his tourist guests their seats.

The four motorcycle boys had asked to be put in a corner by themselves, for they were hardly looking fit to join in with the ordinary guests, several of whom were ladies from the East.

And sure enough there was Barley Hoover, in company with a dark-faced man whom the boys readily guessed must be the half-breed.

During the progress of the meal Hoover kept his back toward the boys most of the time, his companion watching them, and doubtless reporting what they seemed to be doing.

But when the waiter passed the two men in bringing dinner to the motor boys, Hoover eyed the big tray, and was seen to sniff the air suspiciously.

"He's on," whispered Freckles, noting this

action of the other; "he knows the smell of deer meat, and I bet you he thinks it's a part of his antelope we're having for supper."

But although Hoover bent forward, and talked excitedly to his companion, he did not make any hostile move.

The meal ended, the boys left the dining-room of the big inn.

"How did you like your mutton?" asked the landlord, with a wink, as they came upon him in the tap room.

"It was all right," remarked Alec.

"Fine as could be," said Freckles.

"First time I ever owed a panther for a meal," declared Jack.

"Couldn't be beat," Budge thought it necessary to add.

"How about our bunks; are they all ready?" asked Alec.

The landlord put a key in his hand.

"I've had your traps taken out there, guns and all," he said, "and there's only one thing I'd like you to be careful about, which is fire. You know the outhouse is only frame, and I keep a lot of paint and stuff there. Besides, you have gasoline with your wheels, you know. Once it took fire we might have some

trouble putting it out; though I've prepared against losing my plant here by the one enemy we hotel men of the park dread more than anything else."

"You can depend on it," said Alec, "we'll be careful, and if a fire comes along, it won't be through any fault of ours. Ready, boys? Then let's turn in."

Chapter XVII

AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION

The outhouse was removed some little distance from the hotel building, and in fact it could not be said to be near the stable either.

Alec easily understood why this was so. If the landlord kept paint there and perhaps other inflammable things, he knew the constant danger of fire which he incurred. And it was good business, "horse sense," as Freckles would have termed it, that influenced him to keep the store house separated from the other buildings.

The boys soon headed that way.

As Hoover and his companion had left the dining room before Alec and the others had finished their supper, and were not in evidence anywhere around, it might be taken for granted that they had concealed themselves in order to do the spy act.

No doubt, at that very moment they were hovering somewhere near by, and watching the boys.

Perhaps it was just an accident, but all the same Alec and Jack ranged alongside Freckles, with Budge puffing along behind—Budge always did this after he had eaten a hearty meal.

So, on their way to their quarters, the kodak bearer was really hedged in by his chums. It would not have been easy for anyone to have snatched away the little camera to which Freckles clung so resolutely. He held it in his left hand, and his right he kept doubled up in a suggestive manner, as though ready to defend his property.

But, although they were in darkness while making the passage from the inn to the store house, nothing occurred.

Perhaps Hoover and his partner suspected that the boys would be on their guard, after learning how they had been followed.

And the bad man Hoover remembered what a resolute front Alec and his chums had shown on the occasion of their last meeting.

Besides, how were they to know but what one of the boys was even then carrying, concealed under his coat, the six shooter which they had taken from his belt at the time he was held up?

"Anyhow, here we are," said Budge, as though more or less relieved when they found themselves alongside the store house, without anything in the way of an attack disturbing the peace.

Alec unlocked the door.

"Just hold your horses a minute, fellows," he remarked. "The landlord told me there was a lantern hanging on a nail just on the left, inside. He said he wanted us to use it, because it was the safest thing he had, and the chance of it setting fire to the building was small."

When, groping around in the place indicated, Alec found the article, he carried it outside before he struck a match.

"That will have to answer us," he remarked when the lantern had been properly lighted, and the protecting globe drawn down.

Having entered the store house, the door was immediately closed and locked.

"Say, this ain't half bad," remarked Budge, as he looked around him; and from his manner it was apparent that the fat boy had been preparing himself for the worst.

Freckles threw himself down on one of the four cots that had been ranged in a row.

"Strikes me that ought to make a bunkum old bed," he remarked, with considerable of satisfaction in his voice. "And believe me, it's going to beat sleeping on stones and roots all hollow. We're in luck, fellows."

When Budge, after critically examining the three remaining cots, in order to discover if there was any choice with regard to stoutness, finally rolled over on one, he shut his eyes, and folded his hands across his breast, meaning this to indicate his complete satisfaction.

"Wake me when breakfast's ready, boys," he remarked, in a sleepy tone.

Perhaps he would really have gone to sleep just as he was, but Alec "influenced" him to get up and remove his shoes and leggins, as well as his coat and the cap that carried his goggles.

Sometimes it required considerable to "influence" Budge, especially when he had been eating heavily, and felt sleepy.

In this particular instance it took the united strength of his three chums to get the fat boy on his feet, divest him of these various articles of wearing apparel, and then drop him back again.

Alec kindly threw a blanket over him, for Budge was so far gone he hardly knew himself what he was doing.

"Good for ten hours, I guess," chuckled Jack.

"Happy Budge," remarked Alec; "it's precious few troubles that ever keep him from sleeping.

"Still, would you want to be like him?" asked Freckles; "as for me, give me an active mind and body, even if I do have to carry the white man's burden of responsibility."

"Hear! hear!" said Jack, pretending to clap his hands, whereupon Freckles, who was fond of "spouting" at times, grinned amiably and subsided.

The three of them, not feeling like going to sleep just yet, found places to sit together while they canvassed the situation.

"We've got to have some air in here tonight, you know," declared Alec, "and so we'd better take a look at the windows."

"Sure thing," added Freckles. "I never did like the smell of paint more'n the law allows. And you'd find me gaspin' for breath inside of three hours."

He jumped up and went over to one of

the two windows which the hotel store house sported. Presently the others heard him raising one.

"Don't you think that's going to be a little risky?" asked Alec.

"Yes, for you lifted the sash all the way," Jack added.

"No danger, fellers," the lanky one chuckled. "'Cause why? Well, you see, our good friend, the landlord's been wise enough to put heavy iron bars across the same."

"Then what's to hinder our shoving up a sash in the other window?" ventured Jack. "It'll make a good current of air through here, and keep us from getting headaches because of the paint smell?"

Freckles only needed half an invitation to get busy. He was a nervous boy, and never so happy as when doing something. Budge and Freckles were as much unlike in disposition as they were with regard to looks.

But the air did seem better after this second window had been attended to.

Several times Alec left the others, and went prowling around. Now he was examining the door and windows; or again, clearing a number of empty boxes away from

where they cluttered the floor, and evidently bent on impressing the character of his surroundings on his mind.

Both Jack and the tall boy understood.

"He'll know this blooming old shack so well," remarked Freckles in a low tone, "that he could get right up in the dark and prance around just like he was in his own room at home."

"It's Alec's way," was all Jack said, but it covered the situation exactly and doubtless Alec could not have lain down to sleep unless he had thus drawn a mental map of his surroundings. In case he had to move around in the pitch dark, this knowledge would prove most valuable.

But presently Freckles was seen to yawn twice in rapid succession.

"Perhap's you'd better turn in, Freckles," suggested Alec.

"Well, I admit my lamps are getting pretty dim, and I'd like right well to see how it feels on that cot, after sleeping on the ground two nights," admitted the other, stretching his long arms.

"Then get your leggins off, and beat Budge at his game," laughed Jack.

"How about standing watch?" asked Freckles, doubtfully.

"Oh! I guess we needn't bother about that," said Alec, at the same time giving Jack a sly punch; for truth to tell, the two of them had just been arranging matters between themselves, whereby they expected to at least "sleep with one eye open."

So Freckles, being very tired, got ready to crawl under the heavy blanket that lay upon his cot.

The others noticed with amusement that after removing his leather coat, in the pocket of which he carried the precious developed films, securely protected by cardboard covers, Freckles found a place to hide it. And then he tied the strap of his camera to the leg of his cot, possibly fearing lest a stick, with a nail at the end, be inserted through the bars of the nearer window, and the kodak carried off, after its position had been in some way discovered.

Finally, when all these various proceedings looking to the security of his possessions had been finished, Freckles tucked himself comfortably under his blanket.

"Alec," he said, sleepily, "just remember

that if anything happens, I'm on earth still and ought to have a hand in the blooming row."

"Oh, sure, I'll remember," replied the other.

"I've got all my armory right handy—the gun's still able to do business at the same stand; and that heavy old six shooter holds a full house of lead pills. Good-night, fellers."

"Good-night, Freckles," replied both the others, with considerable affection in their voices.

Though both Budge and the lanky one had many queer habits, at the same time they held a warm place in the hearts of their two chums. There odd ways were only on the surface, after all, and deep down both Freckles and the fat boy were "true blue" every time.

Left to themselves Alec and Jack conversed in low tones for quite some time. Not that there was any danger of the sleepers being disturbed. It would require an earthquake to arouse Budge, at least, when he was comfortably asleep.

Then the boys went around again, while

Alec pointed out a number of things he had noticed.

"I was wondering what that box of damp ashes was for," said Jack, "but I reckon you've explained it when you speak of fire, Alec. That landlord has got a head on him. He knows that with this paint and oil about water would only spread the flames. It takes earth or ashes to smother such a fire, just as you say."

"Anyhow, I'm glad they're here," remarked Alec; "though I hope we won't have any occasion to use the same."

"No telling," Jack said, with a meaning back of his words.

He fully believed, deep down in his mind, that the bad man, Hoover, had not chased after them so resolutely, without having some desperate purpose in view.

By one means or another he meant to get possession of that convicting picture, or make sure that it was destroyed.

And what was a little thing like arson to such a man as Hoover? No doubt this would not be the first time he had fired a house, in order to secure revenge, or cover up some robbery.

When they had apparently fully covered the field, so that there was nothing more to be said, the two chums got ready to turn in.

Alec took charge of the lantern. He believed that he could manage to light it again without incurring too much risk, in case it became necessary.

And when Jack sang out that he was all fixed, Alec "doused the glim."

Darkness reigned within the store house then.

It was not absolutely pitch black, for a faint light crept in through the windows, especially that one toward the hotel.

But when sleep is the one thing desired, no one bothers about such a little matter as that.

There were various sounds floating in to them from the hotel—voices of men and women on the broad verandah; and even a snatch of music, as some one played a few popular airs on a mandolin.

But finally even these sounds did not appeal to either Jack or Alec, nor did they know when they ceased, for both tired lads had passed over the border of dreamland.

Chapter XVIII

FIGHTING THE FLAMES

Alec opened his eyes.

Somehow, the pungent odor of smoke must have aroused him, in spite of the fact that he had been sleeping heavily.

Instantly he sat bolt upright. The storehouse was no longer dark, for through the windows came a glow that was constantly growing.

It meant that the very thing Alec had feared had come to pass. Baffled by a locked door, and the iron bars across the windows from getting in to try and steal the camera, Hoover and his companion must have started the fire in the hope that the offending kodak might be forgotten in the haste of departure, and be burned to ashes.

Alec's first act was to reach out and drag the blanket off Jack.

"What's the matter—oh! they've gone and set us on fire!" was what the other exclaimed as he sat up.

Even as Alec was bounding off his cot

and pulling on his shoes, there was another upheaval close by.

"Smoke! Wow! call out the fire company! Let's get busy!" cried Freckles, and in his frantic desire to climb out, he pulled the blanket with him, so that he rolled over on the floor in a mess.

Alec jumped to the door, and turned the key, because the fire was on the outside, and must be fought there, if they hoped to keep it from communicating to the paint and oil stored within.

Jack, trying to get his shoes on, saw the active Alec pushing and straining at the door.

"What ails it, Alec?" he called out, groping for his second shoe.

"Don't know. Seems to be fast. It opens outward, you know. I've unlocked it, but for all that it won't budge an inch!"

"Then they must have put a plank up against it," declared Jack.

"And shut us in here like rats in a trap. Wow! I like that—nit!" roared Freckles. "Here, wake up, Budge, you sleepyhead; we're being cremated, don't you hear? Get a move on you!"

Budge did not dig his fat knuckles into his eyes, as was his habit on ordinary occasions, upon having his rest broken.

He rolled off his cot to the floor, but immediately bounced up, just like a big rubber ball.

"Well," said he, and showing less alarm than might be expected, "somebody open the door, and let me rush my *Old Hurricane* out!"

"Door won't move an inch!" cried Freckles. "Alec, what can we do? Hadn't we better begin to yell, and shoot our guns out of the windows? Some of the people in the house would hear, and perhaps get around in time to open the door, even if they didn't save—hello! what in the dickens is Alec doing now?"

His last remark was caused by seeing the other climb up on some boxes, which Alec had himself piled in a heap earlier in the night, and apparently from no motive other than to get them out of the way.

But now it appeared that he had a plan in his head even then, and was looking to possibilities.

Up in the ceiling of the almost flat-roofed building Alec had noticed a trap door or

scuttle. This undoubtedly must lead to the roof, and once he gained a footing there, it would be possible to hang over the edge, and drop to the ground outside.

"Yes, you fellows begin to shout for all you're worth," he called back. "It'll get help here; and besides, scare the house burners off."

This was the one possibility he did not fancy—having some one pounce on him before he could lift a hand to extinguish the fire.

Of course it did not need a second invitation to start Freckles and Budge going for all they were worth.

Even as Alec, throwing off the scuttle, began to draw himself out on to the flat roof, he heard the greatest uproar possible.

"Help! Fire! Whoop! Help!" both boys were shouting, and Jack soon added his voice to swell the chorus.

It would have to be a sound sleeper, indeed, who could pass through all that wild disturbance unmoved. Freckles was also inclined to whang away out of the iron-barred window, with his heavy six shooter, but Jack managed to snatch it from his hands.

"Better not shoot!" he called out; "it might keep them from coming out, because they'd think the bullets were flying, and all that. Just yell for all you're worth. Fire! Help! Everbody come quick!"

And Alec?

No sooner had he gained the roof than he decided which side he ought to choose for making his descent.

The fire had been started on the side away from the hotel, apparently with the idea of warding off discovery as long as possible.

And so the boy, without hesitation, hurried toward the opposite quarter. He threw himself down, crawled over the edge, and hung by his hands.

Then giving himself an outward push, he let go his hold above.

Striking the ground, he rolled over. But as he had figured it all out beforehand, he knew the distance he would have to drop was not great enough to cause any injury.

Scrambling to his feet, Alec first of all ran around to the door. It was his intention to at least open a way for the others to get out. That was the first step in his hastily arranged programme. Four pair of hands

would be just that many times better than one, in fighting the flames.

And if it was found that the fire had gone so far as to defy all attempts to get it under control, with the door open perhaps the boys could at least run their machines through to safety.

It turned out just as Alec had expected.

There was no lack of illumination now, and he instantly discovered that a long, stout post had been placed in a slanting position against the door, which opened outwardly, as he well knew.

Even a cavity had been dug in the earth, so that the lower end of this post rested in it. A dozen men imprisoned inside the storehouse could never have opened that door. If help came at all it was necessary that it be from the outside.

Alec never hesitated a second.

For aught he knew the bad man and his partner might even then be hovering near by, ready to use firearms in order to prevent any one from removing that post.

Alec went forward on the run, just as though he were filling his old position of left tackle on Staunton High's football eleven, and found

it necessary to hurl himself at the runner who was trying to carry the pigskin oval for a touch-down.

With one tremendous heave he sent the offending timber flying. Then the door, no longer barricaded from without, flew open.

"Come out, everybody, and fight fire!" shouted Alec.

Already Jack had dashed through the opening, and he was carrying in his hand a bucket filled with that sand.

Thus, it could be seen that the understanding he and Alec had arrived at on the occasion of their last conference was already bearing fruit.

Jack knew the right thing to do, and was eager to be at it.

Already Alec was busy.

He found that they had no small task ahead of them, if they expected to beat out the fires. And as a sort of insurance against possible defeat he shouted out:

"Budge, you be getting the machines out as fast as you can!"

"All right!" answered the fat boy; though he did dislike going back into the endangered store house the worst kind, fully ex-

pecting some sort of an explosion of benzine, turpentine or naphtha to overwhelm things.

But Budge was just as stubborn about doing his duty as he was in connection with other things.

"And say, please yank out my leather coat, and that kodak—you know why!" called Freckles after him.

The other three were working like troopers as Budge came hurrying out with the first motorcycle. It was not his own, for Budge was taking them just as they came. But across the wheel lay the leather coat of Freckles, showing how Budge could rise to the occasion when thoroughly awakened.

Why, he had not even taken the time to put his shoes on, though when first bursting out of the store house he carried them in one hand, and when he hurried back after the second motorcycle he was limping, as though the stones bruised his tender feet.

Meanwhile Alec was kicking aside the small wood that had been piled up against the building, and fired; after being saturated with kerosene, to judge from the fierceness with which it burned.

In this heroic labor he was ably assisted

by his two equally determined chums. Freckles had found an old broom, which he used to assail things with might and main.

Swish! it would sweep through the air, sending some of the burning stuff flying this way and that. Then Freckles would dab it into the horse trough that stood handy, and start another furious assault.

Meanwhile there was Jack, scattering his sand where he believed it would bring the most immediate returns. It did seem to have a wonderfully quieting effect upon the hungry flames. Wherever it fell the fire seemed to lose all heart, and in some cases gave up the ghost entirely. And later on, when the hotel man admitted that he had prepared that tub of sand to act as a fire extinguisher Jack understood the reason for its marvelous work.

With three such energetic fire fighters at work, it would seem that results could not be long in showing.

And indeed, Alec was so much encouraged by the progress he and his chums were making, that when Budge hove in sight again, escorting the second motorcycle, and breathing

hard with the exertion of doing things on the jump, he called out cheerily:

"That'll do, Budge. It don't look as though you need fetch out any more. We've got this fire by the throat right now. And here's lots of help coming. Freckles, look out for your coat and the kodak. One of these scoundrels might steal 'em if a crowd collects."

Freckles did not believe his help was needed any longer. And besides, the broom had been on fire so many times that it was by now reduced to almost the bare stick.

So he darted upon his coat, put it on, and snatched up his precious little camera from the spot where Budge had just placed it.

The landlord proved to be built of the right stuff. He did not waste a second in asking how it had all happened, but immediately led his posse to the attack. After the fire was completely out, would be the time to figure up the damage, and learn how the midnight conflagration had started.

Of course it was soon all over, with so many willing hands to fight the flames. The last spark had been trodden under foot when Alec came out of the storehouse with the lantern ready for lighting.

"You might as well look into this now as at any other time," he said to the hotel manager, "and see what you're up against. When men get to the point of burning a house down, and fastening a parcel of boys inside, they're going it pretty strong, I think."

The landlord was not only amazed, but he was furious when he saw how that post had been planted to hold the door of the fire trap closed.

"Warrant or no warrant," he declared, "and no matter if I draw the ill will of every bad man in Idaho, I'm bound to arrest that Barley Hoover on sight. I'd like to send him, under guard of course, to Colonel Seagrave, with the compliments of you boys. This is certainly the last straw on the camel's back."

Just then a man came up and said something in a low tone to the landlord, whose face showed signs of sudden excitement, as he turned to the boys and the fire fighting tourists.

"I hope you'll all stand by to give me a helping hand," he said, impressively. "My stable hand tells me Hoover and his pal have

hidden in the hay mow. We'll surround the place, and hold them there, while I send a message after the troopers camped on Sweetwater Creek."

Chapter XIX

HELPING UNCLE SAM

There were no shouts or other uproarious demonstrations over the announcement which the proprietor of the hotel had made.

But those who gathered around the store house which had just been saved from destruction, gave him to understand that they were willing to render what assistance lay in their power.

Alec and his motorcycle chums were of course ready to undertake their part of the risky business. They had a particular interest in the outcome, since the bad men seemed to have them down on their list of those against whom they meant to wage a vendetta.

And if the boys hoped to complete their grand tour of Yellowstone Park on their wheels, visiting what wonders of Nature that had not as yet been seen by any of their number, it was an object with them to have these men caught.

Surely, with the bitter hatred of a man

like Hoover directed against them, they would never feel safe while on the great reservation.

And so they entered heartily into the plans of the hotel proprietor.

First of all they finished dressing, for apparently there was to be no more sleep for any one that night.

"What time is it, anyhow?" asked Budge, smothering a yawn.

"Around one, I guess," Freckles answered.

"Just a quarter after," announced Jack.

"And the landlord is burning flares in several places, so that it's light as day all around the barn," Alec remarked.

"If Hoover and the half breed are in there, they won't dare come out as long as it's as light as that," Budge declared, confidently.

"Perhaps not," said Jack, "but they're bold men, you know. No telling what they may be up to. And if they guess we're sending for the troops, I imagine they'd try a rush before morning."

"How will the landlord send word?" inquired Freckles, as he picked up his gun with an air of grim determination.

"One of the parties owning a car has offered

the use of it, to take the messenger over to the camp of the troopers," Jack replied.

"And how long till they get here?" Budge wanted to know.

"Not till after dawn. After they start it will be a good long gallop for the horses, for the country is rough between the creek and here," answered Jack.

He had a done a lot of talking with the hotel man, and seemed to be better posted even than Alec, who had spent more time looking after the motorcycles, and making sure every spark of fire had been extinguished.

"Huh? that might mean three hours," grunted Budge.

"All of it, and perhaps four," Jack admitted.

"Whew! and we have to stay awake all that time, Jack?"

"Some of us do, those who have guns. The hotel man is fitting out a number of his guests with shooting irons, and placing them around the barn. We'll have to take our places in line pretty soon," Jack went on to say.

"And how about the machines?" asked Freckles.

"Oh! it'll be safe to leave them now," Alec broke in. "Besides, we'll leave Budge here to look after them. He has no gun, and four hours is a long time to lie on the ground behind a wood pile, or a lot of stones, watching a barn all the while. It's much better in here where there are cots and blankets."

Budge was inclined to rebel at first.

He seemed to feel that it was making him out a baby, to always leave him out of the firing line when there was trouble on foot.

But wise Alec knew how to handle Budge, all right.

He convinced him that there was as much honor in guarding their precious motorcycles as in watching the barn where the two men were supposed to be hidden in the haymow, and perhaps asleep all the time.

"Oh! well, if you say it's my duty, Alec," Budge grumbled, "and that I'll be helping a whole lot by staying here and watching the wheels, I s'pose I'll just have to do it. But I do wish the time'd come when I could have a gun, the same as other fellers. Never seem to get what I want. If I had my good old guitar here right now, why, those four hours'd

pass all too soon. But of course it couldn't be."

"Tough luck, Budge," chuckled Freckles.

The others were secretly just as well pleased. The idea of Budge sitting there for four blessed hours, and making night hideous with the doleful sounds he called "music," was a terrible thought. Still, it might have shortened the siege of the haymow, because after enduring that agony for an hour or two, the bad men would likely throw up the sponge and surrender, willing to accept almost anything in order to escape such punishment.

Of course this was Freckle's humorous suggestion. He did not make it directly to Budge, but waited until alone with the other chums. But Alec declined to hunt up a guitar from among the hotel guests, in order to try the experiment.

Upon leaving the fat chum to take charge of the store house, Alec had instructed him to lock the door, and make himself as comfortable as he pleased with the blankets.

"I hope they don't come and shove up the door again, with a log," Budge remarked, "because I'd have a heap of trouble climbing

up through that little scuttle, like you did, Alec."

"Make your mind easy, Budge," the other went on to say, "nothing's going to bother you here. And remember, we'll be close by, within hearing. If you get in any trouble and want help, just sing out. We'll come flying to the rescue. That's all. You've got your duty laid out, Budge, stick to it."

And so they left him.

It was certainly light enough around the barn, where the haymow was situated. If the farm hand had been correct when he announced that Hoover and his partner were hiding in the hay, they were now surrounded.

The landlord looked after the three fires personally. He said they would be kept going until broad daylight if it took every stick in his woodpile. This attempt to burn his store house had apparently aroused him to the fighting point, and he was determined that these two rogues at least should be brought to book.

An hour passed.

There was no change in the queer situation,

and no one could say that he had discovered any sign of life about the haymow or barn.

If the men were there they must either be asleep, or else lying low, watching all that was going on. Perhaps they expected to make a bold dash later on, when the vigilance of the besiegers might relax.

Jack and Freckles were together, Alec having been paired with one of the hotel guests, a gentleman who had hunted big game all over the world, and to whom this little affair came as a sort of tonic.

"Wonder if the car got to the trooper's camp by now?" Freckles remarked, more to have something to say than anything else.

"From what the landlord told me, I reckon they've had time enough; that is, unless the camp's been changed inside of three days," Jack replied.

"Two more hours to hang out here. Wonder if we can stand it. Wonder if them house burners are really and truly in the hay? Wouldn't it be a tough joke on the lot of us if, after all, it turned out we'd been watching an empty cage, with our birds flown?"

"We're taking chances on that," said Jack.

"But why don't they do something, then, Jack, to let us know they're on deck?"

"Perhaps it's part of the game to keep still. They may expect to pull the wool over our eyes, and make us believe they're gone. No matter, all we can do is to stand on guard, just as if we *knew* they were there."

Freckles every now and then gave some manifestation of his impatience, but Jack knew how to handle him.

So another hour crept by.

Three o'clock had come and gone. In about one more hour the dawn would begin to be along.

"What's that?" asked Freckles, suddenly, "sounds like an auto coming."

"Just what it is, for a fact," Jack admitted.

"D'ye think it's the one we sent out to give the alarm at the troopers' camp? Wow! I hope now they ain't bringing us any bad news;" and Freckles craned his neck to catch the first glimpse of the returning car.

It came buzzing along.

"I see it, Jack!" exclaimed the tall chum,

"and what's this? Seems to have a full house on the return trip. Now, where d'ye suppose they ever picked up such a lot of pilgrims on the road?"

"Where are your eyes, Freckles?" cried Jack, in a pleased way. "Look again, and you'll see shining buttons. There, did you hear that click of steel hitting against steel? Two carbines striking made that noise, Freckles."

"Troopers! By hokey! they've gone and piled as many in the old machine as she would hold! Bully! Now won't we have old Barley in a hole. He's waited too long to slip away. Oh! I guess his goose is cooked. Look at the troopers running around to find shelter, would you? Say, if them game poachers are peepin' out right now they must guess it's all over but the shoutin'! Wow! what's that?"

A shot had suddenly sounded.

As a flash was seen in the direction of the haymow, it was evident that one of the men in hiding had fired. Seeing the troopers had aroused their ugly passions, for it told them how slender were their chances of escape now.

"Cracky! did you see that?" exclaimed Freckles, tremendously excited now.

"Yes, he must have hit that last trooper, for he began to limp," replied Jack, who of course had his nerves thrilled almost as much as his companion.

To be under fire, and engaged in a real battle with desperate law breakers, was a novel experience for the boys.

There had been some half dozen troopers in the car. Doubtless they had been sent on ahead by the officer in command of the detachment, with the sole purpose of holding the two desperadoes at bay until the balance of the troop could come up. And Jack thought it clever play.

Apparently Uncle Sam's men did not intend that the shooting should all be on one side, for presently the carbines began to make merry music. The soldiers evidently had plenty of ammunition, and meant to make the most out of this opportunity, to use some of it up.

Once or twice there was an answering shot, but doubtless those in concealment considered that for them to discharge a weapon only increased their own peril, since

it served to concentrate the fire of the troopers on that spot, and betrayed their whereabouts.

"I wonder if it's all over?" Freckles asked, after a long spell of appalling silence. "D'ye think they've been put out of business, Jack?"

"No, I don't," replied the other, "though there's no telling. I understand that this Hoover is a tricky fellow, as well as a reckless one. Perhaps he's up to some sort of dodge right now. Just watch and see."

"Anyhow, the day's coming now," ventured Freckles.

"Yes, in half an hour it ought to be broad daylight. And if they haven't managed to sneak away by then, it's going to be all up with Hoover."

"I guess that's right, Jack. But say, mebbe I won't be glad when it's finished, I'm that excited I seem to shiver all over. But I wouldn't miss this business for a cooky. Wonder what they're doin' right now. Think they could a managed to slip away by some hook or crook? Oh, I hope not. I'd hate to think we'd done all this sentry duty for nothing."

"Don't worry about that, Freckles.

Chances are it'll pay you. And if the day comes along, you might get a chance to snap off a few pictures."

"Gee! think so, Jack? Say, wouldn't they be thrillers, though? Mebbe our friends in Staunton'd believe the classy yarn we spun, if we c'd show 'em the pictures of the capture of the bad men and game poachers. And the troopers would give some tone to it, let me tell you. But Jack, what's all that smoke back yonder?"

Jack uttered an exclamation as he saw what the other meant.

"As sure as you live, Freckles," he burst out with, "they've set fire to the hotel barn."

"Who—the troopers, to burn 'em out?" demanded the tall boy, excitedly.

"No, Hoover and his partner," replied Jack. "You see, it's got to be desperate with them now, and their only hope is to escape in all the confusion."

Chapter XX

CONCLUSION

"Do you think the trick will work?" Freckles asked, as they watched the smoke pouring out of the barn, and beginning to settle all around, for there did not happen to be any breeze, and the heavy air prevented it from rising.

"I hope not," was Jack's reply, "but all the same it's a smart dodge. Hoover knew the smoke would hang like a fog curtain, you see. And he hopes we haven't got men enough handy to throw a circle around the barn, so as to keep the pair from slipping away."

"Well, he's got another guess coming then, because right now, Jack, I hear the pounding of horses' hoofs off yonder. The troopers are coming; bully for that!"

"It's just as you say, Freckles," declared Jack, "they must have made better time than anybody expected. And from the sounds, there's quite a bunch of the rough riders, too."

Alec came hurrying up just then.

"Orders are to open fire, and keep them from rushing out," he said, hurriedly.

"If we can hold them for ten minutes we've got them in a trap. Besides, the shooting will keep them from hearing the thud of hoofs. I· they knew the boys were so close they'd be willing to take any chance rather than stay to be caught."

Already the carbines of the six troopers had begun to sound. They had taken up positions so as to block the escape as much as possible. And by moving around, more or less, they might puzzle the two men who were at bay, since they could not judge the number opposed to them.

"Ain't this the queerest thing that ever happened to us?" asked Freckles, after they had fired several times, so as to add to the confusion.

"It certainly is," replied Jack. "That smoke is like a fog now; and how strange the flash of each gun seems. You notice that the two fellows in the barn don't make any reply."

"P'raps that's because they've already got past the lines," Freckles suggested.

"We'll soon know, and that's a comfort," Alec told them, for he realized that the oncoming troopers must by this time be very close.

"And it's good-bye to the hotel barn," remarked Freckles.

"Looks like it, unless things wind up pretty soon, so the landlord can get his fire department busy. He's a wide awake hotel man, and seems to know the worst thing he has to be afraid of here is fire. But it would be too bad if he loses his barn. All on account of us, too, for Hoover wouldn't have come this way only for Freckles taking that snap shot picture."

"But there must be animals in there?" remarked Freckles, "and they'll be sure enough roasted unless something's done soon."

The boys looked at each other.

"Do we dare try it?" said Jack.

"I'd hate to have all them hosses burned up," declared reckless Freckles, who was always ready to undertake anything risky.

Alec was also urged on to action; but being more deliberate as well as careful than the tall chum, he weighed the chances before deciding.

"The stable is really separate from the

barn, where the haymow lies," he observed. "While it isn't on fire yet, it will be very soon. I don't think we'll run up against Hoover on this side. And the firing has about stopped now, so we wouldn't take many chances of being hit."

"Do we go, Alec?" demanded Freckles in a strained voice, that was husky because of the boy's excitement, and the irritating smoke as well.

"Yes, come on!" said Alec, quite carried away with the fascination of the venture; for just then there had come the shrill whinny of a horse, and from the stable, too.

The boys could imagine the poor animals straining at their halters, and rendered almost frantic by the dense smoke; for instinct seems to tell them of the presence of an enemy they fear above all else on earth—fire.

So the three boys pushed forward.

The smoke was so dense, and hugged the ground in such a peculiar fashion that, groping their way along, they might have had some difficulty in reaching the stables only that wise, long-headed Alec had carefully impressed the lay of things on his mind before starting.

There was very little smoke aloft. And the stars were most of the time plainly visible, so that Alec, making use of his knowledge of woodcraft again, had laid out a straight course.

"Here it is!" said Freckles, who had been half choking with the smoke.

The side of the frame stable loomed up before them. It was a low affair, and used only to keep the horses in; though possibly during the severe winter season it also housed the hotel milch cows, now in pasture.

"And the rest of the troopers have come," declared Jack.

"Yes, I can hear them deploying so as to completely surround the place," Alec added, as he groped for the stable door.

"Woof! I only hope they don't send many volleys in here, then," Freckles remarked, though he showed no sign of the "white feather" act.

"I don't think they will," Alec hastened to say, "all the shooting up to now has been done against the barn. It was known that there were horses here, and somehow it goes against a cavalryman's grain to wound a good mount. They care for their horses almost as

much as Arabs do. Here's the door, boys."

"And wide open, too," remarked Jack.

"That's queer; but p'raps the two poachers slipped out this way. Hope they get gobbled up by Uncle Sam's boys in khaki; that's what. Do we go in?" and Freckles gave evidence of doing whatever he was told, regardless of consequences.

"Come on!" said Alec.

"We're with you, Alec!" cried Jack, dodging after his leader.

"Wow! who's afraid?" exclaimed Freckles.

And by this time they were all inside the stable.

Around them they could hear horses neighing shrilly, and plunging desperately about, as they tried in vain to break loose.

There was quite some light coming into the place, what with the several windows and the open door. The billowing smoke made it difficult to see; and such was the confusion existing that the boys had to shout at the top of their voices in order to make themselves heard.

"Cut the halters if you can't untie them," cried Alec, "then let the horses alone to find

their way out through the door. But 'ware of their hoofs and teeth."

It was well to warn so impetuous a fellow as Freckles, who often acted on sheer impulse and without thinking. So frantic were the animals that they could not recognize the boys as their best friends. They might trample them to death in the stalls, in their overpowering fear.

One by one the horses were cast loose. They seemed to know where the exit lay, and no sooner did they find themselves free than, whirling around, they bolted through the open door.

Those who formed a cordon around the stable and smoking barn must have guessed from this fact that some tender-hearted person was bent on saving the helpless stock in case all the buildings went down.

Perhaps this was one reason why the troopers, having surrounded the spot, refrained from sending a volley. A number of the dismounted ones, indeed, under the leadership of the active hotel landlord, started in with a hose and buckets to try and smother the fire.

"Alec, come this way; and you, too,

Budge," said Jack, as he managed to clutch hold of his chum, when the last of the horses, so far as they were able to tell, had been set free.

"What is it now?" asked Alec, possibly suspecting the truth.

"They're flattened out in a manger here," replied Jack.

"Whee! d'ye mean it?" cried Freckles, even forgetting to rub his smarting eyes, such was his new excitement.

"I'm dead sure," replied Jack. "Everybody got a gun still, because we may need 'em?"

"Yes, hurry up, and let's root 'em out!" exclaimed Freckles.

Whatever the object of the men could have been in thus concealing themselves, the boys never fully understood. They were satisfied, however, to take things as they found them.

Upon being ordered to come out, one at a time, Hoover and the half breed climbed from the manger. Apparently they were somewhat awed by the tremendous results that had followed so closely upon the heels of their little attempt to pay back the debt

Hoover believed he owed the motorcycle boys.

They elevated their hands at Alec's brisk order, and agile Freckles soon saw that all weapons were taken away. Then, still covered by the guns of the three chums, the men left the stable.

Of course they soon came to the cordon of troopers, and saw their prisoners delivered into safe keeping. And when many more hands were enabled to carry water, the fire in the barn, thanks to the absence of wind and the fact that it had not yet reached the haymow was presently gotten under control.

Freckles was seen to jump up and crack his heels together. In the light of day, his face smootched with black, Freckles was a sight to make one laugh, but he seemed as happy as could be.

"Talk about about your poetic justice!" he exclaimed, "don't this just take the cake, though? To think that after all it came to us to make Hoover and his pal prisoners. And they'll get theirs, believe me. Shooting an antelope on the reservation doesn't cut a candle to tryin' to burn buildings down,

with boys shut up in the same. Let's tell Budge!"

So away they all raced, to relieve the mind of the one whom a cruel fate had debarred from having a share in all these wonderful happenings.

Judge of their surprise, and the disgust of Freckles when they had to pound on the door several minutes before Budge opened up.

He had only been "taking a little nap," Budge protested; but Freckles was firmly of the opinion that the fat boy had slept all of the time they were absent.

However, Budge was eager to learn all that had taken place, and beamed so good-naturedly upon his chums when he heard about the capture of the two bad men, that Freckles changed his mind about lecturing him.

"After all," he said, shrugging his shoulders "Budge will be Budge."

And both Alec and Jack agreed with him.

When the troopers had departed, taking their prisoners, the excitement quieted down somewhat, and breakfast was gotten under way.

But the boys who had been in the spot

light during all that row, were looked upon as heroes by the lady tourists, yes, and by the gentlemen as well. When they rode away, mounted on their motorcycles, a storm of cheers followed them. And polite Budge, wanting to wave his hat in reply, as though he deserved a share in the applause, came within an ace of plunging into a ditch.

As for Alec and Jack, they were glad to get off. This thing of being looked upon as heroes and asked a thousand silly questions, did not please them one half as much as it did Freckles, for instance.

The balance of their motor trip through the park was almost in the nature of a picnic; for outside of an adventure with a buffalo cow that Budge ran into, and from which he escaped with only a few bruises, nothing of note happened.

Freckles managed to get numerous snap shots as he went, and even one of the bighorn sheep feeding on a plateau away up in the mountains, close to which the boys climbed, after leaving their wheels in the canyon below.

He was just "tickled to death" when he

developed a roll of film, and found the two pictures of wild life Alec had secured.

Of course, in due time they again paid their respects to the colonel commanding the park patrol, and received his warmest praise for the evidence they placed in his hands, and which would surely help to convict the two bad men.

All the way back home, Budge was counting the hours that must elapse before he could have his beloved guitar in his hands once more.

"And my home is half a mile away from yours, Budge," remarked Freckles, so sweetly that the fat boy never detected the vein of sarcasm back of the words.

While we take leave of the four motorcycle chums here, we shall surely hope to meet Alec, Jack, Freckles and Budge again at no distant day, in new fields of adventure.

The End.

AN AWAKENING AT ALVIN.

ALVIN is a small town in eastern Illinois, a short distance north of Danville, and is a junction of a branch of the Wabash system with the Chicago & Eastern Illinois railroad. The place is large enough to stand the racket of a small brass band, but not of sufficient consequence to support a hotel or bakery. It was evident that either the postal clerk running on the Wabash branch or some person in the Alvin post-office was stealing ordinary letters and rifling registers.

After a two-hours' consultation on the case by a committee of three, Henshaw, "Judge" Bedell, and myself, it was unanimously decided that the work was not being done by the postal clerk. It was too well performed. No living being on a railroad train, by any known or unknown art, could cut and reseal a registered package envelope as artistically as these had been cut and resealed There was no record of any work of the kind that approached it.

Could it be the postmaster at Alvin? It certainly had that appearance, but he was a man who seemed as far above a crime of this kind as conception could conceive. He had not been disturbed. No one had

written to him and nobody had called. His suspicions, if he had any, had never been aroused. But there was certain information about the office we must possess, and we must know more about him and his methods. Yet, it would not answer for an Inspector to call on him on any pretense whatever. What should be done ?

The postmaster was a druggist, and sold cigars ; so we decided to fit out Bedell as a cigar agent and let him call in the regular course of business and do a little drumming and pumping. A fancy case was borrowed of a regular Chicago dealer, into which was neatly packed a sample box each of McConnel's Perfectos, Con. Mehoney's Shamrocks, Mrs. Kelly's Pappooses, Carter Harrison's Best, Fred Hill's Favorites, and Tol. Lawrence's Prides. A team was procured two stations north of Alvin, and down into the sleepy hamlet Mr. Brooks, the agent of Chesterfield, Schoolcraft & Browning, quietly wended his way and presented his card at the Alvin drug store and post-office.

It was harvest time and mid-day trade was quiet, so of course Mr. Brooks found abundant opportunity to do business without being jostled about by applicants for tobacco and tanglefoot for medical purposes. His prices were the most reasonable of any agent who had called since the war ; but that was explained by the fact that this house always surprised its customers with good goods and low prices, and this was Mr. Brook's first trip through that section, and his first visit to Alvin. As a result he remained three hours, sold two dozen boxes of Perfectos, four dozen

Pappooses, a whole case of Lawrence's Prides, and went to dinner with the postmaster.

When he reached Danville about four o'clock that afternoon, where he was to report to Henshaw and myself, he was radiant with the enthusiasm of well earned success. He had studied the Alvin postmaster as thoroughly as he did the ten commandments when a child; was present when the Wabash mail arrived and saw the postmaster distribute it alone for the Eastern Illinois going north; sold him a fine bill of goods, which was not to be delivered on account of the pressing business of the house for two weeks; saw the postmaster lock up the office and went to dinner with him, after which he returned to the office and saw the postmaster endorse the registers and lock out the mail for the Eastern Illinois, north; and everything had been done by the postmaster exactly as a thoroughly honest, upright, conscientious postmaster would do it.

There had not been the first false motion, word or suspicious circumstance, and he would wager his entire lot of samples that the postmaster was one of God's noblest works—an honest man.

He admitted, however, that the facts of the losses were stubborn and that the circumstances were peculiar, and, having now a good knowledge of all the conditions he thought the tests should be applied. It was accordingly arranged to remove from the Wabash mail every day for a week every registered letter of natural origin that would pass through the Alvin office, and substitute decoy or test letters.

These would remain in the Alvin office about

two hours, when they would be placed in the postal car going north on the Eastern Illinois, where they could be hastily examined. It was more of a difficult task than the reader can imagine. The work of preparing the test letters, so that they would appear exactly like genuine ones that had been mailed at the various offices along the line of the road, occupied several days, but by the end of the week we were ready to begin on the following Monday.

Two lists of the letters to be sent through each day for six days, and a minute discription of the contents of each letter, were prepared. Henshaw, who was to go along the Wabash and attend to the delicate task of removing the genuine and substituting the false ones, took one of the lists, and the other was retained by Bedell and myself, who were to examine the letters when they came from the office and were placed in the north bound car. It would necessarily become our duty also, in case anything was wrong, to strike while the iron was hot and secure the transgressor.

On Monday the letters came through in good condition. Tuesday and Wednesday brought no good results. By making haste we could usually get them out of the pouch and have them examined before the train left the Alvin station. By so doing it would give us an opportunity to step off the train, and thereby save time, if the examination proved that the letters had been meddled with.

On Thursday, while the train was still standing at the depot, we found our letters, examined them, and, as usual, pronounced them correct. The train pulled

out and had proceeded probably a mile before we had opened the letters to examine the contents, when, to our surprise, we discovered that two of the eight had been rifled and the money was missing.

Quick as lightning the bell cord was pulled, and long before the engineer had come to a full stop, Bedell and myself could be seen walking hurridly down the track toward the station. We entered the post-office as coolly as though we had called for a prescription instead of a thief, and found the postmaster handing out the mail that had just been assorted. Bedell did not look as Brooks did and so he was not recognized.

We waited patiently, listening to the torturing discords of the Alvin Silver Cornet Band that was practicing in the room above the store, till finally the patrons had departed, when I approached the postmaster and informed him of my unpleasant mission, which was, in effect, that some person in the Alvin post-office had, within the last three hours, abstracted $67 from the two registered letters that I held in my hand, and that my friend and myself had called to recover the money.

"Merciful God," said the postmaster, "it is impossible. No person handled those letters but myself; there is my endorsement; so help me, I did not open them, and I swear with uplifted hand before my Maker that this is the truth." As I turned to Bedell, as much as to ask if he ever heard such a falsehood, the gentle summer breeze wafted in something that admonished us that the silver cornets were trying to catch the air of "Dan Tucker." Bedell, feeling sorry

for the postmaster, the band, and me, turned to find relief by reading the labels on the bottles.

I told the postmaster that while I did not charge him with the crime I would like to have him satisfy, if he could, that the money taken from the letters was not then in his possession. To this he most cheerfully assented, and search was made not only through his clothes, but through every conceivable place about the office and store where it could possibly have been secreted.

At length we became satisfied the money was not there, but, of course, not satisfied that the postmaster had not taken it. I asked him if any person other than himself ever assisted in handling the mails, and he answered: "No one." "Does not some person other than yourself have a key that will unlock either of your store doors?" "Yes." "Who is that person?" "It is George Havens, the leader of the band." Turning quickly to Bedell, I said: "The leader of the band has a key to the rear door, and he steals in while the postmaster is at dinner."

Five minutes later the horn that once through Alvin's hall the soul of discord shed, now hung as mute on the band-room wall, as though that soul had fled, and George Havens had been called to account for appropriating to himself certain funds that had not been contributed for the purpose of buying instruments, music, and flashy uniforms. But George had been around the world some himself, and had learned a few airs and quicksteps not mentioned in the books. He was a hard nut to crack.

We labored incessantly with him till sundown, and

had taken the horns and band-room apart, had been through his residence, with his wife's permission, from the bottom of the well to the top of the lightning rod; had torn up the floors of several neighboring buildings; had been through the brick-yard and the burying ground, and, in brief, had completely upset everything in Alvin looking for the $67 which we did not find.

There could be but one conclusion. Either the leader of the band or the postmaster had the money, and we were agreed that it was not the latter. As a last resort we decided to take Havens to Chicago, and, possibly on the trip up, or during the night in Chicago, we might get something from him that would clear away the mists.

We reached the city at ten o'clock, without obtaining anything except the ride, and by 10:30 we had reached the office, where Stuart, whom we had informed of our coming by wire, was anxiously waiting to relieve us and spend the night with Havens. About four o'clock in the morning, Stuart's burning eloquence began to be felt, and, by sunrise, Havens in tears had confessed everything he had been charged with, and told how he stealthily entered the rear door of the office and committed the depredations while the postmaster was at dinner.

Stuart and Havens left for Alvin on an early train to secure the money; and as they were digging it up in a grove a few rods back of the Alvin post-office, the friends of Havens, who up to this time insisted that he was innocent, concluded, from the appearance

of the valuable articles that were unearthed, that the treasures of Captain Kyd had at last been found.

The postmaster, who was one of the finest gentlemen I ever met, was so effected by this terrible affair that soon afterward he sold his business and moved away. Brooks gave his remaining samples to Stuart, while poor Havens went to play B flat in prison.

CAUGHT WITH A SCRAP OF PAPER.

THE post-office at Attica, Indiana, had been robbed. Unknown persons had entered it through a rear window sometime during Sunday night, and on Monday morning when the mailing clerk arrived, the stove was scattered in fragments around the floor, the letter boxes had been emptied, the safe blown open, its entire contents missing, and the room still retained a strong odor of powder.

It was a genuine robbery, and, for a place of the breadth and thickness of Attica, it was something much more than an ordinary, every-day affair. The postmaster had barely enough money left to wire for help.

When I arrived on Wednesday he informed me that no strange persons were seen in town prior to the robbery, but that on Monday morning about six o'clock, two young men called at the residence of Mr. James Beasley, a farmer residing about six miles eastward, and wanted to engage him to take them to Thorntown, a distance of about twenty miles as an Indiana crow flies. Beasley was a busy farmer, and, not being in the livery business, declined.

They then asked the distance to the nearest station

on the Wabash railroad, and when Beasely informed them, they told him if he would hitch up and take them over they would give him a dollar and a half for his trouble.

Beasley said he would do it, just to be accommodating, and by so doing made a blunder. If he had told them he would do it for two dollars and a half he would have been engaged just the same, and Beasley saw his mistake, as a great many others do, when it was too late.

The only vehicle handy that morning was a small buggy containing one seat, and into this the three men placed themselves, Beasley in the middle, and proceeded to ride to the railroad. While Beasley was hitching up it occurred to him that it was very singular that two fine-looking, well-dressed gentlemen should call at his house so early in the morning and want to hire him to take them to Thorntown, and finally be satisfied with a mile and a half ride for a dollar and a half, which was a dollar a mile, to another place.

His curiosity was thoroughly aroused, and when he got into the buggy with them he intended to look them over very closely indeed, and give them a few questions to crack.

Scarcely had they started before he asked them how it happened that they came along so early. "Have not been walking all night, have you," he asked with a laugh?

The larger one of the two then told Beasley about his lovely home in Kansas; about his poor mother dying in Ohio; about being on the way to her

funeral; about meeting Mr. Cushman, the other gentleman, on the train; about Mr. Cushman being on his way to Cornell University, and last, though not least, about the wreck on the I. B. & W., which compelled them to leave the train and get across the country to the Big Four or the Wabash. The reason he mentioned Thorntown particularly was because he had a wealthy aunt residing there, and he was thinking some of stopping to make her a short visit.

"But what do you carry in that roll, wrapped in light paper, sticking up through your inside coat pocket?" asked Beasley.

"A present for my aunt," was the laconic reply.

Turning to Mr. Cushman, the quiet gentleman who was on his way to college, Beasley asked: "What are you carrying those iron articles for in your overcoat pocket, that I'm sitting on; you are not going to open a hardware store in connection with the school, are you?"

Just then they came to a bend in the highway and the depot was visible only a short distance ahead, and just at that instant, without stopping to answer the question, Mr. Cushman and the big fellow jumped out, and the big fellow said they guessed they would walk the remainder of the way.

"All right," said Beasley, who stopped his horse and commenced to look for a good place to turn around. On his way back he said to himself: "they are a queer pair." They were soon out of his mind however, and in a few minutes more he was home attending to his chores, just as though he had not received one-fifty for almost nothing.

Tuesday morning the weather was a little lowering, so he concluded to drive into town and learn how many were killed in the I. B. & W. wreck. When he learned that there had been no wreck on the I. B. & W. or on any other railroad, he said to Mrs. Beasley: "How could those fellows, whom I carried yesterday morning, have had the audacity to tell me such a cold-blooded falsehood?"

A few minutes later when Mrs. Beasley had heard of the robbery, she answered the question.

In my interview with Beasley, he informed me that he looked the young men over very closely, and so firmly were their features impressed upon his mind that he could pick them out of ten or fifteen thousand. I had never met a more sanguine man. I arranged with him to take a few days' vacation, and, in less than an hour and a half after my arrival in Attica, I was waiting at the railroad station with Beasley for a train to take us to Indianapolis.

Thorntown, from Beasley's house was directly on a line toward Indianapolis, and, while there were many other stations nearer to Beasley's, Thorntown was the only one between LaFayette and Indianapolis, where every train that passed over the road was sure to stop. Here was a water tank whose supply was never exhausted, and this fact we assumed the robbers knew, as well as some others. They knew if they could reach Thorntown by Monday night they would be able to catch a south-bound freight that would land them in Indianapolis, and no one would be the wiser.

All day Thursday, we looked for the mysterious

strangers in Indianapolis. We went everywhere where such persons would likely be. A thousand men I saw who looked something like them, but every time I called Beasley's attention to them, he would say, "No." To the captains of the police Beasley described the men minutely. They could think of none who answered the descriptions in every particular. Beasley examined the pictures in the rogue's gallery and in every other gallery, and all without success.

The captains said they would wager their lives that the men did not belong to Indianapolis. If they were looking for them they should go straightway to Dayton, Ohio, "where," said they, "more thieves hang out than in any place in North America, with the possible exception of Windsor, Canada." It is true if these men belonged to Dayton, they would have taken exactly the same course to reach home that they would have taken to reach Indianapolis.

Friday morning bright and early found us in Dayton, waiting for an interview with the Chief. Presently he came, and to him and two of his assistants I told the story and Beasley described the men. They had a man there who answered the description of Cushman, the quiet gentleman, and they also knew one who answered for the large one, but they had not heard that he was out of prison yet.

Handing Beasley an album, containing the pictures of a few of the well-known notables, the chief asked him to see if he could recognize any of them. Scarcely had Beasley commenced to turn the leaves of the book before his eye caught a familiar face, and,

jumping from his seat, he said: "That's the big fellow."

"This was Tettman," they said, "one of the most accomplished safe workers in the State, and the little red-headed fellow, whom you describe, is Reddy Jackson, a quiet hard-working robber, though not as renowned as the former."

The officers assured us that if these men were in Dayton, they would be only too happy to find and deliver them to us, and with this end in view every policeman in Dayton was notified to search for them, and to run them in if possible, while Beasley in high glee took a position on a prominent corner to scan the passing throngs.

About seven o'clock that evening word came over the wire to head-quarters that Tettman and Jackson had been safely landed in one of the station houses. It was quickly arranged to remove them to the county jail, a more secure place, and it was desired to have Beasley stand just outside the door of the station house, so that when the prisoners were marched out to enter the patrol wagon, he might get a good look at them under an electric light, and thereby make sure that they were the ones we wanted.

When they passed him he turned to the crowd, and with much complacency said: "Them's the fellows."

Afterward, while interviewing one of the officers who made the arrest, as the men were coming out of a notorious saloon, he told us that when he told Tettman that he wanted him, Tettman instantly put a piece of paper in his mouth and commenced to chew

it. The officer did not like the looks of the operation and he grabbed the man by the throat and ordered him not to attempt to swallow what he was chewing.

After considerable of a struggle he secured a portion of the piece of paper, which he handed to me saying: "I don't know as it amounts to anything, but I was afraid it might, and so took the precaution to prevent its destruction; sorry I was not quick enough to get it all." The little scrap of paper contained the following memoranda:

12,427	at	2c.	248.54
3,240	"	4c.	129.
747	"	5c.	3
892	"	10c.	
165	speci		
400	du		

On the preliminary examination before the commissioner in Dayton they fought bravely. Their case was managed by the best counsel that could be obtained, who attempted to prove that Tettman and Jackson were in Dayton the day before the robbery in Attica, the day of the robbery, as well as the day after.

In fact there was very little proof necessary for their side that they did not produce, but the quality, unfortunately for them, did not equal the quantity.

Beasley's straightforward story was accepted by everybody, and when we proved by the postmaster from Attica that the number and the denomination of the stamps stolen from his safe corresponded precisely with the number and the denomination as

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noted by Tettman on the little slip of paper, which he attempted to swallow, the case was closed and the prisoners were sent to Indianapolis for trial.

On the trial the same character of evidence was introduced by the defendants. Ours was also similar, though in addition to that introduced in Dayton, we proved that a novel and ingenious brace found on Tettman's premises in Dayton, which contained irregular and unnatural features, and which left the same impressions on the safe, was the only brace in existence that could have performed the work which the Chief of Police in Attica pronounced "exquisite,"

The jury was out just five minutes, and two hours later the two distinguished travelers, who mistook Beasley for a chump, were enjoying a free ride to Michigan City, where they are still industriously working for the State, cracking pig iron instead of safes.

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